Cured Quail

VOLUME I

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Prolegomena to Any Future Editorial

The critic need not be able to do better than that with which he finds fault.
— G.E. Lessing

1.

Let us presume, for a moment, that illiteracy need not represent a line dividing those who can read from those who cannot, but instead refers to the habit of hanging private thoughts on the framework of grammar. We begin with a simple dictum that the reader does not find what she desires, but desires only what she finds. The adherence to a generic world turns into its opposite and the reader of our dictum comes to impute into herself the categorical imperative to subject everything other than self to self. Perhaps with this rendition we approach understanding how a society inundated with words can be so suspicious of ideas. Even now, the present authors cannot help but suspect that the mediating universals between each sentence appear as bottomless chasms inviting resentment from the reader.

Under the defensive mechanism of seeing oneself in everything, reading requires that when aversion stirs an attentive *unfollowing* is practiced. Who today hasn't learned to live by distraction? Apperception then, born out of the discovery of imitation, culminates in a thought: *this is the way things work.* Seemingly facile, the approach advances the means by which language dwells in the presence of husks.

It follows that the projection of the reader is a prohibition on the writer. Just as one finds in clichés the experience that is his due, so must readers find in the appearance of words on a page ideas adequate to themselves. 'Have you read [insert a name that identifies a milieu]?' turns into exacting a reply ethically appropriate with the life of a shared fantasy. In response, how might one discern and trace a social economy of reading and writing whose ideal model is the wordless furniture assembly manual?

The present authors thereby invite those interested to participate in the dilemma of a journal that, in all likelihood, *will not be read.* Bothered by the fact that the leniency of language has turned against itself, this introduction outlines the terrain and substance of *Cured Quail.* We would like to approach the fact that words, like the lives that carry them, appear predominantly without meaning—while, following in the spirit of Karl Kraus' *Die Fackel,* refusing to look the other way. Rather than cynically guilt people into reading more, *Cured Quail* would like to encourage others to indulge in the discontinuity between themselves and what is to be read. The aporia potentially offers an alternative to readers who, justly distrusting the authors, find in that disjuncture experiential content. After all, words subsist in saying something that hasn't been thought or thinking something that cannot be said.

2.

Ours is, without fail, an epoch lacking the incentive to pause in the presence of an idea. We read the way we do everything else: sycophantically, timidly, incoherently. A book can be both a bestseller and, at the same time, the most widely unread.[1] In the past, the breakdown of authority gave prominence to ideas. They used to ride in on horseback. Now, the impatience over long ideas fades into a skepticism over their very existence. "[E]ars which have not let themselves be deprived of their native sensitivity cannot help hearing that they are talked into something." Forced into pandering to the experience of its patron and affirming what is already the case, an "idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, [lacking] the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative."

Words obstinately remain the medium in which the first integration between subject and object takes place, "the great medium of spiritual unity." When considering the circulation of a thought, it would be inaccurate to elicit the analogy of the commodity—the latter at least incorporates a law of competition. Rather picture a clump of fallen leaves, half floating, half sunk, in a kiddie pool for the contemporary efficacy of an idea lacking bold relief. Sloganeering masquerades as discourse while hashtags run in packs. Twitter is said to carry out revolutions while tumbling down a click hole outpaces the page-turner.[2] "[A]ll around us in the cultural sphere we see only the spectacle of the intellect latching onto a catchword when a personality does not have the strength to keep silent and draw on its own resources." Barred from conceptions of severity, we have entered a world in which there can be no entering of adulthood.

Since the restructuring of the 1970s, the celebration of indeterminacy has unveiled its own set of party tricks. When it is not simply adhering to formal analytic schematics, the thought of this society places its bets on a cockfight of competing and extrinsically intersectional discursive narratives anemic to universality. Holding discourse primary, affective multiplicity supplants all epistemic foundations within a plurality of identities. Each is more depraved than the next and readymade for being misunderstood and excluded. For the exaggerated subjectivity, knowledge develops as an interpretive enterprise the moment the faculty of discernment evaporates.

It used to be said that what thought lacked above all was trenchancy, an appeal for ideas to become *dangerous*. This plea was a luxury our own epoch can no longer afford. Saying two plus two equals four has in fact become an insurgent claim at a time when the paramount wager of a public debate becomes the validity of objective reality itself.[3] Has common sense become as unpredictable as the weather?

Perhaps there is nothing new with struggling to maintain attention. Hunger can topple a

sentence faster than poor grammar. Words, despite the allure of thinking of them as company, cannot take the place of things, persons, or a place. They cannot be kept or tracked, followed indefinitely or counted on to fortify against butchery. Not learning to read and write is non-negotiable, it is an apparent and real fact for some people. This is not our discussion. Instead, we want to distinguish the ways in which language has stopped meaning, and where there have been exceptions.

We are concerned with illiteracy as a studiable phenomenon. And the ways in which visual media on the one hand, the culture industry generally, and temporality in music ultimately contribute to this. We are resolutely against discussing food, but are willing to grant there are myriad endeavors providing us with tasteless alternative.

3.

In 1951 Adorno described the offensive ring accompanying the words 'cultural criticism'. At the time, its tone elicited a viewpoint positioning itself exterior to its own object. It criticized culture without comprehending its own imminent position and as such, fortified itself as a "salaried and honored nuisance". However, its process of not understanding that which it judges is an historical development, one in which its enthusiastic degradation unto a propagandist or censor can hardly be said to characterize cultural criticism in the present moment. No intellectual or political investment propels cultural criticism today. The *Halbbildung* that culminated in the postwar period no longer bears the signature of the bourgeoisie—who initially emancipated the idea of *culture*—but instead now indiscriminately pervades the social whole irrespective of one's relation to the process of production. The universal right and indefeasible soundness of public opinion speaks both in-itself and for-itself. Even the conjunction 'cultural criticism' itself murmurs grey and would do best to make way for the niche and employment skill of 'cultural commentary', a common road that can be taken in casual dress whose preferred implement is the *text* over any meaningful piece of writing.

Despite these differences, Adorno's reflections wield invariant tendencies. Similar to the traffic cop, the rank of cultural critic synchronizes with its surroundings while bickering with that environment's individual products. Technologically aided by the latest platforms, they are spry and without the gravity of committing to the difficulty of an idea. Expeditiousness takes on the appearance of clever judgments. Criticism has rescinded to that simple and virtuous model of the exchange relation for which one opinion is worth just as much as another: the *thought* of the general equivalent. The exalted transparency of communication—the language of abstract and empty practicality—has become the universal medium of untruth that levels all qualitative distinction under a bright moon in which all cows are commensurate. It is the vacant claim of a freedom whose antinomy is found everywhere: ecological catastrophe grants passage for luxury cruises across the hitherto frozen

Northwest Passage; the intimacy of a 'girlfriend experience' proliferates while the consumer market for sex robots comes into its own.

To reproach the claims and presuppositions of cultural and aesthetic products is to tread upon a delicate territory. At present, the clamor of economism resounds from the depths of critical analysis whose concern with material impoverishment stands "ready like worms to content themselves with dirt and water." In the face of unprecedented underemployment, austerity and debt, invoking cultural criticism can appear as simply epiphenomenal, or even insensitive. However, in times of crisis, critique is responsible for premises of greater scale. The transformation of the world is not executed by the economy itself, nor in realizing its unfulfilled dreams of need and want. In fact, one implicit aim of *Cured Quail* is to explore and demonstrate the common stake shared by each perspective: that sensational and urgently felt anguish of the social whole threads together the proclivity of taking something for an experience not experienced. "By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss."

4.

In these loud times for which one is rarely at a loss for words, the relentless veneration of communication places the prospects for *another* journal at a disadvantage. Further, a journal having anything to do with art cannot presume its own legitimacy, nor can it, notoriously, be self-evident that anything "concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist." As such, aside from the aporia of a journal self-knowingly premised upon an illiterate world, *Cured Quail* must also distinguish itself from other publications by abandoning the confidence of presupposing *prima facie* external relations between culture and nature, the artist and the commodity—in a word, between art and society.

Cured Quail seeks to approach the works of both intellectual and artistic phenomena on their own terms and unearth—whether satirically, covertly or inadvisably—the contradiction between what is said and what is meant. To write on art today bears greater import than its simple supplement. There is the added difficulty of having to recall an experience of sensibility while furthest from it. More often than not, writing today oscillates between a clever wit without commitment or a postured sincerity floating on the surface. Successful writing on art predominantly consists in cursory patronage for seasonal furor and positing substance where there is none, usually under theoretical premiums with only the semblance of coherence. Bygone pedantic recitals on art history on which personal taste was mounted are almost lamented for their edified stability. In contrast, today's hostility towards any type of specialization procures watered-down meanderings that celebrate indeterminacy by speaking "circumstantially and, as it were, plastically". Its promotional copy weaves in and out of history arbitrarily while being largely informed by menial gossip accompanied

by dubiously loose analytic associations and phraseological archetypes manageable by underage feed followers.

The editors of *Cured Quail* cannot promise expertise, not for a lack of knowledge, but because communicating takes for granted a shared stake that we seek to question. Instead, we extend an invitation, along with the contributors, to undertake appreciation while granting that there is widening deafness to just such an endeavor. That may be the fitting reaction by which to judge our progress. Nor can the editors pretend humility. It would be just another cunning way of the journal to advertise itself by accommodating others. Further, it will come as no surprise—to those who have learned to be suspicious—that we do not intend to be topical by prohibiting thought to catch its breath, nor can we account for trends or identities that would grant either a larger audience or a minority to find themselves in our pages. This is said with the caveat that, in the future, it is inevitable that both groups will be irrelevant, and that which is written will be a record and not a force. For this, it can be said that *Cured Quail* will try to think at the level both required and repulsed by the times.

— *Cured Quail*

1. Jordan Ellenberg, "The Summer's Most Unread Book Is...," *Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 2014, http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-summers-most-unread-book-is-1404417569.
2. Against the charge of nostalgia, let is be stated that it is of course easy to join the cultural niche curmudgeonly bellowing the unforeseen consequences of what is referred to as the 'information age' and the way it might be said to be adulterating 'millennials'. However, it should be soberly recalled that the development of technological mass media is only the most frivolous expression of a *social need* that requires instantaneous communication, a need whose origins cannot be reduced to technological capacity *per se*, but that historically specific *social forms* already administer the content of social utility.
3. Tina Nguyen, "The First Trump-Clinton Debate Is Getting Weirdly Metaphysical," *Vanity Fair*, September 26, 2016, http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/09/fact-cheking-presidential-debate.

Like Sand Through an Hourglass: These are the Days of our Lives

Zachary Dempster

CREATIVE INERTIA

I used to share a studio with an artist who collected books but never read them. He enjoyed theory, particularly when it could be clarified by succinct passages in Helvetica or was designed by Bruce Mau or associated with Semiotext(E). He wasn't keen to expend energy on content but relished the shape his lips made when titles and authors were mentioned. In fact, there was nothing to discuss, just constellations of names, that swirled common knowledge through proximities and intensities, and the microadjustment made during a conversation to redistribute emphasis, based on the minute saccadic rhythms of his interlocutor. His dance would advance with an overall calculation for the merit estimable through measures of judgment on a personality, who was who to whom, and so on.

An active day in the studio would find my colleague repositioning the furniture, but when the skies were gray, and they often were, inspiration would dip, and his efforts went to arranging books into ziggurats and Lincoln Log-like formations. As months strode on, and I was able to know him better, I learned that his appetite for the trends of publishing industries was unquenchable. With a regimen of binging and purging, new reserves would arrive, and challenging selections would be made. Passé titles were dismissed, banished to underneath and unseen places or stored in boxes fortifying the room’s periphery. It was a cycle of titillation, of going online to surf feeds of content currency, impulsive purchases, and mail delivery reception.

Predictably the collector needed therapy. His depression, the result of a late clinging pubescence, manifest in public displays of private creativity, i.e., he liked to pee in front of people. The shrink he saw was an average Brit with a smitten face, which often passed as a sign of intellect; he came highly recommended. Originally from southwest of London, he'd been a dogsbody in Glasgow as a marriage counselor. To the analyst's credit, he was a legitimate neurotic, who in treating patients managed his mental illness, showing brilliant

frugal wit.

The physician took great pleasure in administering what he'd termed the diligence of *deep thoughts*. Like most therapists, he modeled his professional practice on the confessional, but where he broke with routine was visiting patients at their office. Upon arriving his ritual was to have the client dim the lights, and while tousling his shaggy bangs with one hand, he’d give the other reign to fiddle freely. Coyly soliciting his penitents to describe early erogenous discoveries his neatly pressed jeans rattled intimacy, leaning near the soul search was on. Later, after maximum solemnity, a candle was lit, and instruction was doled out for completing somewhat mundane crafting projects. Believe it or not, patients came from far and wide to meet with him, though predominantly from the north, where the technique was well known and practiced regularly on dark nights. In droves, youths would arrive saturated with fresh dispositions of lively urgent variety, ready to relay personal trauma. Anybody too ruddily complexioned, laughing from the stomach, asking for a stroke, was labeled peccant and saw the docs dispassionate grimace, and the backside of his hand.

The latter would have proved a better outcome for the book collector, whose malady grew worse thanks in no small part to therapy. Master of avoiding expression through the artifice of juggling reference, his approach played hell with the productivity of the physician’s intimacy cure, which above all else worked by fixing on the rarity of the barely substantive human. Then by harnessing a pretense of significance to an act of representation, engendering a motif, he’d procedurally harvest quaint themes. Ultimately these were exchangeable for self or another (e.g. symbolic or monetary) kind of worth. The melancholic was a rock, unwilling to submit to the ingenious treatment, and over the year and a half I knew him, grew dourer with the prospect of subjecting his principled knowing-nothing to the clinician’s promissory emblematizing. He liked integument, and wouldn’t be coaxed into modest exhibitionism for maudlin trinkets of authenticity, small prizes, he felt, adorning endless public accountability. And so he determinedly took a less than zero approach, and to thematically consist began smoking heroin alone in his apartment; conveniently located in a red light district.

While helping my former studio mate’s father put his possessions in crates, I discovered the

book collector’s last extant writing. Folded lengthwise and sandwiched in *Dot Dot Dot* issues two and five. I transcribed his jottings, word for word, leaving the intimacy and repetition intact. I can easily imagine people will venerate the document's profundity for ages to come—though I’ve noticed frequent cribbing throughout.

> When wind and winter turn our vineyard to a bitter Calvary, what hands come out and crucify us? If one person approaches a painting they will inevitably stare at it for less than three seconds before they make up some portion of their mind about what they should do with it. If it needs to be photographed, or if it needs to be commented on. These are two of a small set of responses. Also what can happen is that a person can walk up and know something about a book, they can then talk about their opinion from their perspective, professional or otherwise. This is my long and drawn out way of saying that I want to be left alone. That I have nothing to say, and yet I am still faced with having to say nothing. I have nothing to say to a painting or a book, nor do I have anything to say to a reader. Not that a reader would ever arrive in front of my words. If a reader did I would try to bore him, and ask him to leave my company. I have nothing to say and I don't want to please him, or plead with him to understand. In fact I want to be left absolutely alone in mind. That is what I crave above all else. I want to not say anything to anybody and not, in the very next second, say less to the person who I am in a room with. These days I am seldom in places with anybody. I do not have anything to say. And like I have said I do not want to say anything. I do not want to confess, and even now, this is for no one, not even myself, I continue. And I wonder for whom, and basically if I am writing, if the words that I am constructing one letter after another, one thought after the next, why do I spell correctly. This reader over the shoulder, this judgment of God, I don't care. God would be the unhinging of thought from the relation to words and finding a way to tonality. To song, but not as metered, understood and played, nor as surrounded by theory and a practice of listening because to hear would be the same thing as composing, and if in composition there is a direct conversation with God, well then hearing what he had to say back, there would be equally no sense. So a kind of silence is the highest of life’s claims. The silence would signify the passing of time, conscious of the passing of thoughts from one high tingling moment to the next, a low moment. And in between there’d be myths, we could have something called

fiction, periods of time where our attention would dwell on some matter. Fruition would come and go as smoothly as a thunderstorm. The dark heavens enveloping our temple and the cars with their headlights, quiet rain drops. These btw could be our lives, one little package tied to the next, neither one or the other better holding onto the moments preceding. This could be our world. I want a world with another person, a person who dwells in ideas, and is less a person. I want to know how I can be less a person and more an idea. I become regimented with thought. I try to accompany myself along the way. I try to barely move when I eat my dinner with a knife and fork noiselessly listening to time pass, being around the voices of others, and their bodies, I want to be less of every one of these instances. This is what I crave, a little open pathway to wander, not tied to the preceding seconds. The world, a rat race, and the walls are made of plexiglass, and the snails haven't been let in, and here we are, still never, not here or there, together. I want somebody I said, from nowhere and with no flag. I yearn desperately to fall into less of humanity. I desire to lose all walls of self, only lose all self, only to lose the other, only to lose the sense that there is a thought that could differentiate. I don't want the political memories of the world. I am tired of the sounds that make their way in. I don't want to think any longer, but simply be. I feel nothing for this desire. I feel nothing. I am a clock that is wound by social convention and I wind down, just and quickly I have stop cohering with time, and in with others there is nothing to attach to. I cannot care when I do not hit a second, when the second hand and I do not mesh. I do not mesh with others. With writing, or with art, I stand outside. Pathetic only to myself I am ashamed in the presence of others. I'd prefer not to be myself, and I don't like other people either, and I haven't a deep feeling about the matter, simply I do not want to be engaged, and I do not want to join, I want to be a fly on the wall, to float along. I don't want to be free, and I want to fuck desperately as a fiction. I don't desire to feel more than never returning. The return is the consistent hell of other people. Of pulling my socks up to my knee and pulling my pants down to my ankle. I don't desire freedom, or I don't desire to hold the responsibility of happiness in my hands or to construct a world that I want to be a part of. I don't have a desire to have friendship, but then I do not want to break tree branches. I do not want to rip apart leaves or blades of grass. But then there is no higher urge there. At the bottom there is nothing of note. It is simply a way of sitting

on the sidewalk, of passing time, of reading about the day’s weather. Or I never do that. I never feel that I can be present enough. I don't have the weight to return to feeling a certain presence of mind that would allow me to see inside of any other person or something less heavy like a word that would connect the thought with a relation to a person, to being held up to a conversation. The boredom is not a repetition, in its form each thought is new, as new as being old. As old as this way of writing to myself and to no one. Of not ending even when intimacy says nothing. I feel that I do not want to say anything more, but that my fingers demand exercise, and writing is as good as doing something else. Which is what I would have to do if I stop. I would have to find the specifics of how to continue, but if I continue writing, though acting specifically I do not have to continue, I am merely cut free to invent, even when nothing is said except what not to do. This is my lack of continuation, for no one and no one in particular, least of all to myself. And perhaps if I wrote continuously I would never have to look at what I wrote. This would be an immense pleasure. It is like being on a treadmill and having food as a fluid inserted into the body and everything would keep moving. Everything keeps moving and I can stop, but that requires nothing because I will continue. Only the last word matters, which is why I do not finish anywhere and my mind does laps. The worlds I have visited while I write are insurmountably more than what I convey, and so this is why when being with another I waste my time. I am there, but there is with already several other places and people. And so here I am alone, writing, and then there are many others crossing the path and when I say nothing except that I am not saying anything that I am writing about it in the way that I am thinking about saying nothing that I am writing. The world is double, triple and more. I’ve had to leave every style because, as for friendship, I’m indifferent. I don't care for the desire of being cared for. Like a little tin soldier I take nothing in this sentimental sort of way. I am purely an idea adrift. Left on some small floatation device to kick and scream for whatever reason there could be. I could enjoy a party, I could talk to other people and describe thoughts to them. We could have a good time, and we could share more than breath, we could be together for these moments, just some others and I. We could rent a room together and sit there and look at each other and look into each other's eyes. I am there right now in fact, where I won't tell you. I don't feel the need to talk any

> longer. And still here we are at the side of the pool our two tea cups we stacked on top of one another rattling, your fingers getting cooler by the instant from the cat's paw coming in our window. I don't feel you. I don't know where you have gone. I don't want to be with you. This is how t …

TWO ARCHITECTS

On the seventh or eighth box, an architect assisting me packing, questioned whether I had read the books. Since that day, I've replayed this moment in my mind over and over, and it seems to me as though his question was less marvel and more accusation. I could think of nothing to respond. However, since, I've imagined had I replied "no, that they were for inspiration," he'd have shrieked with agreeable delight.

Another architect and I, not the same as above, sat across from one another at a table in a cafe discussing a recent text message exchange, when I hypothesized that in the future our attention would be unnecessary. That instead there will be a program which sees to messaging—rather like a secretary. It will use database driven algorithms of personal literary gestures, along with sets of interpretations to questions, and feeds from daily calendars, updated in real-time, such that it will be able to schedule in-person meetings. In most situations, the program will be capable of accurately replying. I paused, leaning back in my chair, and admitted that this was all conjecture. However, the more I gave features to the dynamics of the communicating program, the easier it became to imagine how it will prove a preferable alternative to the current mess of noisy discourses. Provided the program is a shared platform, given access to a database of replies that the respondent prefers. Discoverable through a database of words which more aptly lend meaning to the receiver's preferred ones, readily determined by tracing what bears immediate reaction in the form of a reply. The program would undoubtedly be better equipped to provide nuanced answers, optimized to include personal errors and idiosyncrasies signaling intimacy, yielding what will most certainly accredit compassion. As is the case with most of the labor intensive scenarios, we've become redundant to ourselves as much as to anyone else. Finishing the reverie, I looked into my friend's eyes, first his right, and then his left, and found only that

the second’s pupil was twice the size of his sister.

PRINTED MATTER

My first impression of New York City's Art Book Fair dates back to 2006, when it was still in Chelsea. Staged on the upper floors of the building Dia formerly owned, the one with the blue and green Dan Flavin fluorescent tube stairwell. It was a relaxed atmosphere, primarily consisting of book collectors and designers. Even the opening night felt mundane, that it better resembled a visit to the post-office than a fair, let alone a party.

Later that year I left the city to study art in Germany and wasn’t back again till 2010 when the fair had relocated to PS1 in Long Island City and nearly tripled in size. I found myself wondering where the swell of readers had come from when all the signs were pointing to the collapse of the book and magazine industry. Metropolitan dailies were discontinuing, Borders had just gone out of business, and broadly speaking paper books were replaced by ebooks, or simply not replaced. Newspapers and magazine were a flurry with stories about the death of print. But at the Art Book Fair a buzzing frenzy of elated consumption seemed oblivious to an otherwise industry-wide meltdown. How had the decline of books launched a book utopia?

Loitering in the museum’s gravel courtyard, near a beer cart, a sense of contradiction grew richer and foggy with loud music and well groomed coiffures. Not only were there people in abundance, but they also donned style and exclusivity. I am out of place I thought, and I weaseled into a conversation with a Norwegian designer, beginning, as I know I’d better, with an ironic jest, *had members of last year's hardcore bands switched to writing poetry?* Apparently, my wit, no doubt coupled with a bland Midwestern accent—resonant with Scandinavians breastfed on American sitcoms—had him endeared to me. He didn’t flee. And so I asked what his thoughts were on the spike in attendance at a book fair. Not skipping a beat, his reply came out with bravado, that it was precisely this moment, when book had become irrelevant, that they were endlessly fascinating. I paused, rather than reply, to consider whether I’d heard an application of a hackneyed concept from Walter Benjamin, that when one technology supersedes another, the earlier ontological structure, on its way to

obsolescence reveals… but before I let myself finish, I saw that in his sterling enthusiasm for clarity he had begun to form a grid with his fingers, two layers of four on four, and then came a shape, like a book, but then it was a box, and then a dove. His mutable disposition was infectious, and so I stepped backward. At that instant I'd borne witness to the resilience books would be made to endure. Losing a capacity not to speak when ignored, a proponent of an unfortunate protraction was happy to dance on.

We are starting to slip. Using up all the proper names in history. One personality or the next.

Around the time Hurricane Sandy engulfed the city, I'd perform a shtick that went something like this: fifty years ago, some downtown artists were of the opinion that the readily available and reproducible quality of print gave the finger to the man by making the art book cheap and disposable, *democratic*. The logic was that it was tough to preserve and collect for value because, after all, it was just shitty xeroxes. However, by the early 21st century, cheapness resembled material fragility, the specificity of the poor ink representations had become nostalgically saturate, and along the way, artists habituated a transposition of their personalities with the dictates of conceptualism's leaflets. To complete the joke, I would heap more disparaging comments on the paper-thin character traits of contemporary artists. However, when Printed Matter's storage basement flooded—and the headlines read 9000 books destroyed or $200,000—I began to take the founders' punk rock aesthetic seriously.

THE PRINCIPLE SHIFT OF THOUGHT ON DIGITAL DISPLAYS

The dematerialization of words into ones and zeros across a platform of ones and zeros marks a qualitative shift for reading by relocating where words appear and how to experience them. The ramification of multiplying the locations of text, on multiple computing platforms and numerous devices in the world, has led to the transformation of the inner space of reading, inaugurating a process of mapping to produce narratives through stacks of digital interfaces.

In the abundance and spastic pleasure of digital feeds, a narrative is the token retention of a

self-sameness in the adornment of sensibilities with a set of triggers for continuation. The way learning another language stands as an introduction to a new culture and increases awareness by providing for enriched exchanges and experiences to build relationships with people all over the world. With the bonus that as feeds the signs seldom register traces on a surface to retain a mark. Instead, compositions of words, pictures, videos and interfaces, trickle in, roughly at a rate approximate to a clarity that finds new results, over and over again. In short, feedbacks of single choices that make a purchase, a crowd size, or a vote expand through the spread of symmetry or asymmetry *ad infinitum*. While furnishing variable affects, and new vertices of interpersonal narrative.

IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING NICE, CHANGE THE SCENERY

Adorno in 1959 lectured on the *Critique of Pure Reason* describing how in Kant's early "philosophy we find lurking the idea that the act of cognition is a kind of exchange in which equivalents, namely efforts and products, are exchanged so that debts are settled and the sum works out." From the standpoint of subject formation to the circulation of sense, the contingency of equivalence carries the practicality of a form and facilitates transactions. Identity, then, serving as a promissory note, objectively functions as a measure of value and can be investigated as such. Palms are greased one choice at a time.

The mouse in his hole, indifferent to an outside hum, has the question of extraction on his mind, his mantra is to estimate how much cheese he must accumulate to weather the winter ahead. That narratives necessitate identity mapping, actively mining self rather than reading, is evident every time a cartoon is confused for a political faux pas. Is it any wonder that the characteristics of a particular organizing stand absent the patter of a thought?

Expression is already the rationalization of the gestural, i.e. its objectification through signification, through 'symbolic function', the immediate through mediacy. And it is precisely this element that is more readily present in alphabetic writing than in the musical score.

Today's navigation signals a significant break from a past activity of literacy, not because

more or less thought is quantifiable, but as the phenomenon of reading shifts to screens, words are no longer rendered as units of literary representation capable of building motifs. An eye moving across a screen, assembling a path through abstract data types, without destination acquires stimulus concomitant to the dutiful strictures of a community of crisscrossing streams. Gains find application as brief articulations of choice. A personality on the horizon, kindness for a fumbling incertitude, and service for the several thoughts happening at once drag along a somewhat physically belligerent canine by the leash, proving that the best masters never give up. When ordering a tub of popcorn at the concession stand, it becomes necessary to speak slowly and in the increasingly simple code, as any variant may disturb the delivery of that very thing making the intermission of thought nourishing.

NOT EVEN MILLENNIAL CONCERNS APPEARED YESTERDAY

Like anything there is a history of literacy, the view that a word is a sign of an indexical quality derives force from the 18th century's recognition of the author as the sole proprietor of her writing. Before that time, compositions of words were a kind of legible handiwork, sometimes inspired, but primarily the result of undifferentiated labor. Afterward—due to writers' departure from a patron based means of support to earned income from the widespread consumption of books—the emphasis shifted to the prowess of the autonomous author's vision. The order of a writer's words became imbued with the particular worth of her mind and birthed a titular style that is today in excess as a remainder. Of a beautiful story once told.

In the last century, the relationship of the author to composition shifted, but not predictably. Post-structuralists, like Barthes ("La mort de l'auteur") and Foucault ("Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?"), perhaps serendipitously questioned the weight placed on the autonomy of the author, by placing it instead on the process of interpretation. What the theoreticians didn't grasp was that the personal computer revolution would—by bringing the bulk of text-based information to digital platforms—effectuate the dissolution of the sovereign author from the inside. All the while retaining the capacity to go about the continuation of differentiating names and matching strings of words. Proving that even when ideas cease to cohere, a

persistent voice asserts, keep the machinery wound and no pulse of discourse need stop.

Viewing the existing situation as dire would be to exclaim over an illness from the 18th century. It is accurate that incessant media feeds stream information such that the capacity for discerning a single thought, let alone an authorial intent, is all but subsumed under the momentum of a collective hive mind. It is inconceivable that writing and reading will return to the autonomy of a figure. Still, effectuating a procedure of an authentic development is worth something. At least to publishing houses and media conglomerates which derive profit from demarcating the limits of content. Along with the confusion of a public, emboldened with the notion that somewhere out there is an identity, fashioned with *my two eyes*, capable of tabulating impressions of a contemporary life through a system of hourly sorting, and may offer little arousal past the invention of the assembly line, but does pay!

As such, there is much reason to err on the side of hesitancy when choosing, and to distrust accessibility as fashionable immediacy. Better to let this wine age. The last decade, with the addition of digital platforms and programs, has quickened the process by transforming words to visual data in a bid to optimize the duty of work and leisure. Making the newest fissure in the history of literacy nothing more than the instructive capacity of handling the transitive nature of picture's expression by the charting of a path through immanent, ever-present, data. But has the subject in the act of interpretation ceased? As these cues for movement have brought with them technologies to become visible and qualifications for their use, new reading skills naturally require further and better training. Connecting, being able to think fast, means little else than operating select machinery, littered about, like so much glitter.

A FACE UP GAME OF SOLITAIRE

The underlying concern is that a reader's ability to use a language critical to the mode by which he personalizes understanding stands in anathema to the prowess of subjectivity. As a reader becomes more embedded, deepens ties, in a precise form of communication, he becomes increasingly unable to step outside. The allure of digital platforms lies in the capacity of having a thought give rise to a surrogate identity, witnessed in repetition by the

user and traceable by interested parties. The effect is shiftable fascinations; *all watched over by machines of loving grace*, playgrounds both online and in real life, reinvigorated by an occasional shot of existential epiphany. Open to all, variable rules apply.

The present information diet has definitively answered how best to act in accord with la dernière mode. Posed since the seventeenth century by the periodical nature of Western publishing. Novels and magazines, gradually accompanied by advertisements, rhythmically promised thrilling experience—the phenomenon of deriving attraction, saddled with excess, has developed integrally as personality traits of individuality. Captivated by his inner divisibility the newly dawned fellow is free to expand his sensibility, and does this by chortling around his broken relations to social production in the world, charmed by nonconformity, and giving credit where it's due, to a surplus value for goods devoted to accomplishing the self-same outcome in perpetuity. This behavior, discovering worth in diversion, sets in motion the criteria by which the price of life acts per the alienated goods of self-production.

Prior to feeds, periodical literature by elevating a series of fashions to self-reflection was early to open the gates of diversification in products and as a medium offering the means for their appreciation. Conversely, what happened on pages was that words formerly read diachronically, over time, diminished into the means by which a publication attained circulation—the overall subsumption in culture allotting accelerated exchange continues to fall shy of delivering significance but offers in its stead the emaciated reader his yearnings. I want to read about things is the shot in the dark deafening the gradual quality of contrapuntal resonance. Were there once words? The quick fix out of a social discontinuity, of coming in apportionable packages, finely wrapped and tied in mutual recognition.

THE WORD ONE READS MOST FREQUENTLY TODAY IS TORTURE

Language, treated as a territory to pass through, finds the fastest route and this involves liquidating concentrated blocks of thought. In the digitally immersive environment the discursive use of keywords and hashtags (abbreviations standing for vested time spent acquiring knowledge) go like hot cakes. Inventions such as Spritz and Squirt, computer

programs promising faster reading speeds, are almost too obvious as tools of the trade. The programs, cites the earlier website, are “[t]he best way to engage with content in the digital age,” work by freezing the gaze on the optimal point where a word bears recognition and reducing the movements an eye makes over the surface of a screen, as flickering signifiers seamlessly coast in. Along with receiving information from *trusted* sources, i.e. the most suitable stream, the velocity is adjustable in order to accomplish a concomitant understanding of the world.

A recent development, perfectly complementing the productivity of readers, sees Amazon, the comprehensive clearinghouse for online publishing (et al.), looking to pay their authors only for the portion of an E-book consumed. A tremendously flexible business model. The University of Texas Professor Ben Agger, writing in 1989 predicted just such an outcome, in the midst of a society mediated by the televised image. He would use the word “acceleration,” early on, to describe the way “[i]nstantaneity rushes thought to 'read' things instead of books.” Words as an estimable relation fit neatly on a spreadsheet, on a shelf, or in your back pocket. Perhaps Agger’s assertion explains the importance of standardized education’s coordination of students into professionalized readers. Whereby, in universities, texts come to be known as an obstacle course in the slow process to attain merit or, via a skipping-stone existentialism, lead to unique experiences of self-description. It is evident thought proceeds trippingly along the lines of usability, and of people, users are made to stand perfectly still in mute observation.

COLUMBUS IS ON THE SANTA MARIA, THE CREW IS ITALIAN, COLUMBUS WALKS DOWN THE GANGPLANK AND WAITING AT THE BOTTOM IS A MIDDLE-AGED INDIAN. COLUMBUS KNOCKS THE INDIAN ON HIS ASS AND STICKS THE SPANISH FLAG IN THE GROUND. AND OUT OF THE BUSHES COMES A SEVENTY-FIVE YEAR OLD SQUAW WITH A CLEFT HEAD AND AN AXE IN HER BACK, BUT THE INDIAN STARTS TO CRY BECAUSE HE KNOWS HE IS GOING TO BE EXPLOITED. COLUMBUS PUTS HIS ARM AROUND THE INDIAN, POINTS TO THE CREW AND SAYS, IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR LAND I’LL GIVE YOU FIFTY GUINEAS. CUT TO A SHOT OF DELACROIX PUTTING THE LAST TOUCHES ON JACOB’S KNEE AS HE STRUGGLES WITH AN ANGEL.

Today it's a breeze to compliment the entrepreneurial wit of the conceptual artist Robert Barry, who in 1971 (the same year as Stanisław Lem's *A Perfect Vacuum*) enacted a golden prototype for a functional ouroboros by asking Lucy Lippard to write a review for a show at Galerie Yvon Lambert that he would use to exhibit said review. Lippard was only too happy to serve as bait, concluding in her text, “[a]nd finally, it doesn’t matter what this review says. Its potential is confirmed by its existence rather than by its contents.” Many years later it was Mark Zuckerberg's envy for the prototype that called him to pay homage by uniting taste making to a Turing machine, transforming audience members into the active critics who would say nothing thoughtfully, while emboldening themselves through participation.

A product without qualities, like Barry’s, leaves untouched the recognizable visual cues of a society rosy in their stimulation. Lending credence to the modular quality of a Choose Your Own Adventure scenario where visual abbreviations for experience bandy about in a corral for an exchange value of individual motif. The wager, of choosing life, is akin to the one mechanically evinced by Mallarmé when varying the fonts and word locations in the 1897 version of *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*. Serving, as Bersani put it in *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*, “[w]ithin the semantic pursuits of language,” where “there are certain rhythmical projects, projects which...displace our attention from the sense of words to those ‘cadences’ through which wordless impressions simultaneously structure and erase language.” Here or not, a game of hide-and-go-seek where the kids no longer play on the streets till the lights go out.

THE DAIKON IS A BEAUTIFUL VEGETABLE

Writing is a loss for readers in the same way that art is a loss for viewers. Representations have to first come to terms with this or a similar pronouncement, or perpetuate the zombie formalism of gridding the ornament of irrelevancy. Much worse than bad taste is to ape the style of *L'écriture blanche* or apprize the limited capacity of communication. The idiocy of a string of light bulbs could be a dead partner or a rigid incapacity to access the language of imaginary universals, and can only exhibit the ugly side of kitsch in the desperation of showing nothing. Bad taste knows the products of life are disposable and revels in the leaky

distraction of capturing the human sneeze, whereas the stylization of irrelevancy is the featureless expression of constipation.

Reading, like looking, is recognizing a shadow on the page. A syndrome undertaken where figures take shape in the abundance of short breath, all activity which comes before vanquishing in this technique of negation, and then habituates to following along the path of lines. Without acquiring the consistency of the later, the mind wanders, returns to another practice, exercised more regularly.

FLY ME TO THE MOON (IN OTHER WORDS)

Having the direct experience of writing and reading derives from a vulgar subjectivism hell bent on collusion. Before a sentence ends nothing more can take place than a lobster red pair of earrings set on the chiffonier that have been chosen to compliment the evening. Precisely why people who do nothing but think about their stomachs prefer tasks, as there is nothing better for them than to be able to count the pieces they put inside. If the early years of education have not eliminated a population's capacity to read and think through churlish tests, then it is due to a select few having to wade longer to effectuate a life occupation. As miners endure, so do the educated, only once the bird ceases. With flippancy, the blog came along, and reading became curating, as did friendship and the customization of the love affair matched with photos for a happy childhood. There is much to be excited about in the coming new technological mediations for socialization, namely mesmerizing filters and imbecility.

Of course, there is a more complicated story revolving around identity. When did it arrive, was it historical, did it amount to a cleaving necessity bound to self-observation? Michael Jackson's *Black Or White*? Us or them, him or I, was there a time when I didn't bend over to tie my shoelaces? The demands are reducible to a set of operations, that when carried through amount to signification and finding applause in the mouth and a fishbowl of distraction on the shelf. Majesty in the art of observation is wholly seeing what stands as finished. Somewhere it was described as the prose of life, that upon impact, a pie thrown smashes with due certainty, each fracture obviating containment.

Why, after so thorough an advance, have contemporary undertakings mustered so little contentment? It could be estimated this way, in a hallucinatory moment, one's fingernail clippings become animate. Thereupon no longer carrying reflection they stop seeking light and instead attempt to make of self-immolation an industry. In a mad daze after choice, the little fellas hasten to the fray to join comrades, who while comparing an integrity of substance, decipher an appropriate strategy for earning and how to get one up. Our diminishing fiber also wonders what goods he can bring home to mama. And that is not merely his phrase, it has become a style, and one that looks good sporting a designer leather jacket.

The current incoherency is nothing more than stowing away a little leverage for the next effort. The reduction of thought to picture-thinking, where a duration of investigation takes place endeavoring to encapsulate elemental aspects of another person wholly or as an observed trend. An initial period where seeing the objective formulation of something exterior, like a small beating vessel, signals life, and movements arise corresponding to a minor, subtle, attraction, like mimicking a song. A game of stimulation to call forth an attention to specify, this is when the present compositions assemble currencies of causality, as unitary as monotonous appearance.

OF A WRITING WITHOUT READING, AND AN AUTHORLESS MEANS OF COMMUNICATING

How then do we communicate? Naturally, we start out presuming that there is more than just one of us. This presumption is the basis of whereby material is used to form the means that become communication.

What then can we communicate, presuming that there is an us? We can communicate us. Say there are two people and they do not want to say us, and instead, they want to communicate a thought that is private, and they want to communicate it together, are they then not communicating? Or are they perhaps communicating and us has to be revisioned? Who then is the caretaker for us? In between the two of us neither you or I want to be the

taskmaster. So it is another, a third, that we silently acknowledge. He doesn't say anything, and yet he is a formidable member of our party.

Overheard at a rest stop en route to Athens from Arcadia, between a goat-footed boy and an old scholar who taught film history at a reputable university. Boy to the scholar: “your students must now come knowledgeable with many more films than any prior time, due to the availability the internet has made possible.” The scholar hemming, replied to the boy, “that is not true, in fact, they've only watched their furniture.”

Marcel Proust, in his preface to his translation of John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, describes a similar situation: “I leave it to people of taste to make of their rooms the very image of their taste and to fill them with things of which they can approve. As for me, I feel myself living and thinking only in a room where everything is the creation and the language of lives profoundly different from mine, of a taste opposite to mine… where I find nothing of my conscious thought, where my imagination is plunged into the womb of the non-ego.”

Everyone today has taste, and as for rooms, there are identities enough to decorate. In Rasmus Svensson and Hanna Nilsson’s 2015 article, “The Block is the Successor to the Book: A publishing proposal,” the two authors revel in stepping forward with the txtblock, “a decentralized tool for publishing and distribution of text in a format called the block.” What their proposal lauds are the parity of words to blockchains, distributed digital databases that are used to index and save every exchange that takes place with the digital currency. This equality would make possible the tagging of tens of thousands of identifiable elements in exchanges, lunging toward a future where words function in an open circulation, making the mediation of something like a human reader an unpleasant node, redundant in an increasingly smooth operating system. Of the genre of the internet of things, a concept derived from Bruno Latour’s nature of things, whereby relational behaviors precede, or are said to stand at an immanent crux, and whereby the unique histories of objects unfold.

Above all else, we do without immediacy because of our hatred of opportunism. Perhaps Proust’s placenta visions will shortly become an installment in the thinking to come.

ONCE TOLD BY AN INTERVIEWER, "EVERYBODY WOULD LIKE TO BE CARY GRANT," GRANT IS SAID TO HAVE REPLIED, "SO WOULD I.”

Books participate at the conjunction where writing and the inventions of paper and printing converge. A tomb: a single book; a graveyard, a library: a bookstore, stand in the place where crowds cement distraction. Located in the bound documents, not unlike the worth in the precious metals stamped on two sides of a coin, is the character of a reserve army—assembled for accumulation.

Parallel the uncovering of meaning in language is the ever-present potential for illiteracy. The effort taken to stem the dissolution of attention has a price and serves as an index traded for equivalence. The contemporary discourse on literacy has shifted to visual signifiers. Allotting that a body of text stands in the place where it has been invited, conducts itself with an appraisable regularity, justifies itself thoroughly, a reader enjoys satisfaction. A misprint here, a vacuum there, and nobody's the wiser. Let’s imagine that a janitor polishing a few square meters of stainless steel depends on a non-abrasive cleaner; his enterprise is to apply generously, rub the surface vigorously and wait until the distortions of looking in take on the functional relation of a gleaming device.

Producing a system made of the general equivalence of signs inevitably harkens back to means of production. Jean-Joseph Goux was half right when he related that the elimination of the gold standard would affect signs with entropy. Before the contemporary turn to semiology, Ruskin was alert with critical voice, describing a more elemental prognosis. Ruskin, describing political economy, during the same historical moment as Marx, tallied the loss of significant and worthy art and architecture. Discontent in the deterioration of quality in mass produced goods and an overall decline of material excellence, Ruskin concerns lay, similar to Marx, in the constraints of delivering profit above all else, but diverged from Marx in staking the confluence in the history of coinage. Of its inherent split of value on the one side, the coin’s worth when melted, and the care placed in the detail of minting the ruling visage on the other side. Ruskin was at odds to describe an equivalence of payment for craft and suggested an ideal solution to alien prices, that art should be made up of precious metals. Making it so that the taste of the time, of the art’s production, bears a

relation to an intrinsic value available at the date of the work’s destruction, or preservation.

Z, i.e. DANGEROUS BEND

Edgar Wind speaking in the 1960s at the Reith Lectures described modern art as “sometimes shrill,” but then remarked, “it is not the fault of the artist alone. We all incline to raise our voices when we speak to persons who are getting deaf.” If this were the case in the sixties, a conservative analysis of the coming years would place the artists in the position of not only yelling at the hard of hearing but doing it in what Ludwig Wittgenstein described as private language.

Within dialectics, modes for representing reality possess a basic if rocky continuity across mediums of communication. The tradition of orally narrating myths shares in a sociality with scientists who use the printing press to convey meaning. In Adorno and Horkheimer's description "the program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy." Where control doesn't cede to an unnamable mover of the universe, humans become the subjective center of their single narrative. It is then in the deictic usage of words that marks reading for continual and rapid change with new technologies and new practitioners of the social form of writing.

A quality of writing, hitherto relying on the value of social coherency, now derives value in textual productions advancing individual fields competing in a marketplace of ideas. The vice of an educated class avarice, of dandyish tendencies to read for pleasure, became the virtue of the pursuit of self-interested gain. The same way in which fungibility attaches to an obsession with personal entertainment. That the forms these spectacles take, not essentially different from the way that fashion based periodicals build a constituency by setting the bar for a performative etiquette, the content of which circulates not only through the reproductive technology, but as well through the social form the implementation takes.

While this mode of representing reality may have the advantage of facilitating the manipulation of the material environment, it does so at the cost of failing to attend to the specificity of any given phenomenal entity; everything becomes exemplary. One

consequence of apprehending reality in this way is the elimination of qualities or properties that may inhere within any given object but which are conceptually excluded from view, so to speak, as a result of the imposition of a classificatory framework. In this way, identity thinking misrepresents its object.

In the absence of communication, there is not just gesture; there are systems of misunderstanding, no more or less complicated than a limit representation. *People so stupid they can no longer do anything but negotiate.*

THREE CONSECUTIVE THOUGHTS

1. Without the conceit of an academic life, the thief rampaged through one book after the next. She’d learned the technique of shooting, which involved entering a library, then closing her eyes and pointing. When she opened her eyes she’d go over to the shelf and read whatever she’d inadvertently selected. She discovered that her satisfaction was not dependent on the hierarchy of a title. That content would yield less and more as she was capable of lending form. Ensconced in her joke, her virtuosity at fabrication was impeccable, even with images she was able to induce and sustain meanings. Intoning to herself, as long as whatsoever I meet in combination with threads of words I assemble marking routes without a destination.

2. The busy misemployment of words happened in a college library, but she recalled another incident. Sitting in front of a piano, where she had only recently learned to coincide the touching of keys in a manner resembling the sound of music. It was at that instant she began to interpret a book of Chinese characters. The book was carelessly left on the rack, and wasn't musical notation at all. Not only did she feel confident that she understood the logic of ideograms, she felt that the highest degree one could reach reading music was listening to the traits as nominal indices. The epiphany occurred shortly before meeting a pianist who used to prepare pianos, and who explained that this was how John Cage discovered he wasn’t straight.

3. Her favorite key on the piano, once prepared, was the one, that when struck, landed the

hammer on a thick wad of paper wedged between three wires. She could play in the differential attributes all night.

4. I used to attend to a garden. My father was a gardener, and my grandfather also. They were good gardeners. My grandfather learned gardening abroad, and my mother was a gardener's daughter. That is why I am such a soft fellow. From our earliest age we have never seen blood, and have enjoyed flowers, but at the war we only live with worms and beetles. They dug me up by the roots from my garden, like an old pear tree. What sort of a soldier am I?

HYGIENIC WRITING

The epitome of a well-written document is its capacity to serve as streamlining addition to thought. The field of the written word having become a machinic experience, seamlessly integrating with a reader’s habit of thought, ultimately giving way to a distanced contemplation on engagement.

HUMAN FACTORS ENGINEERING

It is Johanna Drucker’s contention that the book is a form of technology. Maybe she is not the first one with this opinion, but in her estimation, the book, as a bound stack of paper, has a finite set of operations that when combined do a sort of work. They allow a person to pick a book up and leaf through, finding the table of contents, scope out passages in the middle, perhaps refer to an index, or naughtily read the last page, in such a way that handling a book turns people into explorers, navigating their way through unfamiliar territory. Learning, not exclusively through hierarchies of knowledge, but by wandering around, by becoming acquainted with the terrain. Learning to take steps from previous places, while being able to step away and utilize the elements that help organize a book’s layout. And perhaps there is some sense to this way of thinking. A natural feeling, in fact, having the clarity to maneuver has the advantage of affirming one’s position at every step. However where it falters is that existence limits people, and any such existential approach to presently absorbing knowledge can only be a kitsch experience at the casino, even while smugly counting cards.

Regarding the kind reader's endurance, these pages should not feel overly busy or illegible. But one thing that has been pursued in design, although not striking you over the head with it, has been not to apply the techniques of what designers call readability. Most book designers take for granted that a book can be used to extract information functionally. They then use a set of standards for how to organize and display text and images. This aspect of designing has, of course, migrated to online platforms where designers are now able to observe and optimize an arrangement of minute details to get users to perform.

Robin Kinross, in *Modern Typography*, described the issue of designing for clarity in this way: "[t]he essential modularity of printing could not be fully realized, and capitalized on, until common standards of description and manufacture had been worked out and adopted… Modern typography exhibits a rational impulse, both internally in ordering its own workings, and externally in the face it presents to the world." Movable type, signaling the death of a language of thought, removes the production of meaning from the life of the voice—placing it instead in the features of reproduction. It has been a skip and jump from the reproduction of meaning to the reproduction of meaningful authors. No author now exits herself from the reins of production—her last feat, to stand where she is without necessitating presence. Her life and death mark segments of waiting on a spreadsheet.

It is not a question of the machine overtaking the creative process of the human mind. That is ultimately prohibitively unprofitable. Instead what can be sought in the future, already available in the present, is a situation where the reader who thinks the end of the sentence before it arrives. As common tasks of automation, not in the irrepressible channels of enshrining a screw to the layout.

Taking Comfort In Society: The Sociologization of Art and its Contents

Chris Crawford

"With the continuing organization of all cultural spheres the desire grows to assign art its place in society theoretically and indeed practically; this is the aim of innumerable round table conferences and symposia. Once art has been recognized as a social fact, the sociological definition of its context considers itself superior to it and disposes over it."[1]

I.

Today the properly credentialed intellectual cannot neglect the obligation to equip herself with the right kind of social theory. Whereas formerly it might have been possible to discuss a work of art without launching straightway into considerations of the race, gender, ethnicity, class, etc., of the artist in question, or into whatever social and political issues are latent, manifest, or overlooked in the work, today such analysis would be considered incomplete if not politically irresponsible. Some artists are suspicious of the trend to reduce art to a political or identity position. They reject an interpretation of their work along these lines as the irrelevant prolixity of university professors or as a reaction formation of aesthetically inept journalists. For others, a grasp of “theory” is essential to the artist’s creativity, and aesthetic production and interpretation would be impossible without it. Artists no longer hear the voice of the father defining what is aesthetically possible. They hear the voice of the “critical” social theorist. The centrality of identity is only one manifestation of the social integration of aesthetic consciousness. Just as the historical subject of capitalist society is not humanity but capital itself, that peculiar self-moving form which is the goal of its own process, so the hazy notion of *society* has become the sole subject of art, a conscious and unconscious structuring element of art criticism and production. Art now addresses itself less to a concept of aesthetic experience than to the various theories that follow from the notion of society. The critique of art’s social character requires an analysis not only of the concepts of social theory, history and the philosophy of art, but also how these concepts are both mutually determining as well as conditioned by antinomies. For our purposes, we can begin with the class-based model of committed art which lost legitimacy with

“Orthodox Marxism,” opening a generative vacuum between left politics and the ageing avant-garde. Artists explored art’s relation to the logic of commodity society in a more distanced, mediated way: they collected egg shells and opened storefronts. They disappeared into the ocean, wrote about their compulsion to manual labor, purchased worthless pieces of real-estate, and constructed architectural interventions. What brought these otherwise disparate practices together was a relation between art and society increasingly mediated by the concept. How it might escape its inherently ideological status, taken to mean a compromised position as a useless luxury commodity, oriented much of its post-war history: the intellectually rigorous formulations of post-minimalist and conceptual art; the myriad forms of institutional critique—not so much a movement as an emerging premise of all artistic production; the ironic anti-aesthetic modes that proliferate today, curating in the works themselves art historical references and techniques to play on the hopelessness of expression and the inescapability of society’s logic as a force far too strong for art to transcend. The aestheticization of bureaucracy, a turn to language as material, a move from a politics of class to that of institutions, the expression of non-class-based forms identity, a focus on inclusion, equality, and communalism without politics—all these strategies replaced the idea of revolution and the radical alterity of aesthetic experience with the question of how art should handle its immanence in society.

II.

Art’s integration to social theory—its “sociologization”—is typified by two major orientations. The first understands the work as an instantiation of social knowledge, and criticism’s task is to read an insight out of the dialectic of art’s content and form. The critic delineates a “perspective”—the sociologically pliant category of contemporary aesthetics that replaced style and individual expression, both residues of bourgeois subjectivity, as evaluative markers. Aesthetic experience and criticism become opinion research: the critic becomes a detective of social-realistic cues, and the aesthetic subject becomes an analytic practitioner of base-superstructure reductionism. The most important criteria for art’s evaluation is how faithfully it is able to mirror reality in all its details. But cultural criticism is not the predominant form of socially-integrated aesthetic consciousness. The more significant form treats art as a *fait social* and draws conclusions about its role in the

maintenance of the status quo. Social content is not examined as part of the works themselves; rather, artistic production and reception are considered particular sets of activities which can be exhaustively explained by sociological analysis. Art, emerging as a subfield of the sober, distanced perspective of the academic sociologist, is conceived as a "field" next to politics, fashion, education, and mass cultural consumption. If the first form, cultural criticism, functions as a form of cultural hermeneutics, this second form smuggles in anti-aesthetic tendencies that have been operative since the beginning of modernism. Its aim is to disenchant the making and viewing of art, to uncover the forms of power inherent in these activities.

III.

Today could be considered the age of art after Bourdieu. If we for a moment return to the terminology of his initial object of critique—Kantian philosophy—we might say that the concept of society operates as a *schema* structuring contemporary aesthetic consciousness, not as an objective, material force in the works themselves, but as a set of categories structuring the production and reception of serious culture. Schema, as a critical concept, delineates how conformism, repetition, and standardization inform the culture industry's pre-digested products—the dispensation of sameness as a necessary element of commensurability within the production and consumption of a culture reduced to the form of exchange. In this view, the Kantian schema of pure reason, the spontaneous activity of the mind that brings the sensuous given of intuition under the pure concepts of the understanding, does not emerge as the essential epistemology of every empirical subject. It is *socially produced*, manufactured through standardization within production and its corresponding modes of reception; it is a material reality, internal to the manufacture of things and the socialized human beings who experience them. Just as the repetitive use of a particular software begins to structure our habits of perception and response, so the standardized forms of cultural objects begin to place limits on what and how we are able to experience. Whereas the real, material dynamic of society once found its way transfigured into the immanence of art, today the concept of society operates as an unconscious precondition of art's production and reception. For this reason it is crucial to determine precisely what kind of social theory is operative, as well as to keep in mind that critical

concepts are not immune from the historical dynamic they attempt to grasp. In many instances, these concepts, which once captured the social dynamic taking place within products of culture, have themselves undergone reification and function like a syllabus against which one measures all experience.

IV.

Art's sociologization can be interpreted as the elaboration of the historical legacy of the debate around so-called "committed art," a politics of art oriented by a polemical attitude to the bourgeois' regime of disinterested liking and its art-historical counterpart—*l'art pour l'art*. The social catastrophes of the last century called into question art's naive self-regard as an autonomous realm of culture, and artists responded by aesthetically challenging art's aesthetic character. The attributes that followed from art's semblance, its difference from reality, were problematized *in the works themselves*. The beauty of unblocked expression was submitted to critical, inner-aesthetic *détournement* directed at what were previously considered necessary conditions of a work. The paradoxical result, though, was a *heightened* level of semblance. Committed art took for granted art's capacity to develop into something more than the stamp of a social logic which heteronomously defined its position in the division of labor. The goal was to take control of art's demythologized status and emancipate it from the social ambivalence cherished by the bourgeoisie. That art is a product of a particular society, which it could by extension express, comment upon, and critique that society's logic in the construction of its details, that it was perhaps doing this more forcefully than ever before, all this was to be more explicitly treated and submitted to control. The desire to bring art closer to a determinate praxis could not be separated from the critique of semblance already at work in art's autonomous development. The transformation of form from a sedimented social content to a political *telos* allowed artists to marshal art's immanent social dimension, previously limited to its expressive qualities, into more pointed forms of provocation. But by transfiguring art's implicit critique into intention, committed art combatted the fetish of art's autonomy with a fetish of application. In the act of producing an image of something more than is the case, autonomous art was able to express an altered form of life even as it was limited to images and material from a damaged world, thus solving in itself one of the aporias of critical theory: how to articulate

the correct society immanently, without removing oneself from the concrete socio-historical situation to a utopian idealism. Autonomous art was thus generative of compelling experience precisely by *concealing* its social truth and by taking the taboo on utopian images seriously; its socially critical eloquence was expressed obliquely—through form. With committed art, art's spontaneity was submitted to the logic of practicability—that element of socialization autonomous art negated by its purposelessness from the perspective of society. Art's anti-social character was thus transformed into a revolt in forms that were not always *inherently* antagonistic to the essence of capitalist society. Political art touched its opposite—the stock phrases and functionalism of the culture industry. Art's hermetic alterity, its inner development, in becoming an object of experience, signaled that society was not the totality that ideological consciousness took it to be. By constituting itself as an autonomous appearance, art punctured society's appearance as a second nature. Art's ability to conjure something different stood as an objective restorative to our stunted capacity to do so. Art forfeited this task by taking the status quo, even if negatively, as its only object.

V.

The second form of our schema—what we might call "sociology of knowledge"-inflected art and criticism—can be read as a transformation, as a result of developing socio-historical and art historical conditions, of committed art's repudiation of autonomy. Art's critical interventions *upon* society, which never had better than dubious results, gave way to self-reflection on art's place *within* society. The emergence of art's sociologization does not have a linear history, but it can be speculatively traced both to objective, socio-historical changes as well as to theoretical developments of which Bourdieu's anti-philosophical-aesthetic is only a part, i.e., to the predominance of social theories which delineate elements of culture as manifestations of their material base. The relation between art's autonomy and its political efficacy proved a productive but irresolvable tension from Dada to Brecht and the Situationists. The "construction of situations in life," as a form of cultural activity, was characterized along the lines of communization—as "inseparable from the history of the movement engaged in the realization of the totality of revolutionary possibilities contained in present society." [2] The end of committed art's heroic phase and its political preconditions had as much to do with the history of society as aesthetics. The belief that art

could aid in the transformation of society could not survive the dissolution of the belief in revolution itself. Artists no longer felt comfortable squaring their work with narrow political aims, particularly as society seemed increasingly dominated by abstractions which function with equal necessity in both capitalist and socialist countries. Art's orientation to society often forced it to lift contents positivistically from society's surface, transforming social forces and conflicts into images even as society's ultimate contradictions are antithetical to any such representation. Disillusionment, conscious or not, on the side of political action, led to perspectives removed from the goal of transforming reality through the configuration of revolutionary consciousness. In order to distance itself from a narrow comportment without abandoning its critical function altogether, art's bearing toward society underwent a subterranean modification: socially critical art lost faith in the concept of autonomy as well as commitment. Art could unshackle false consciousness only if it punctured society's ideological totality if it made society appear to be the historically contingent form it truly is. In this way, art believed itself to be acting *on* society as well as through it. Sociologized art became skeptical of the claim, implicit in both autonomous as well as committed art, that immanence could ultimately lead to critique. It was more important to demonstrate how truly trapped art and its consciousness has always been. Art was always ideology insofar as it shielded itself from the consciousness of its emergence as a form parasitic to social production, a part for which the bourgeois character could never fully forgive it. But art's rebellion against itself only highlighted its dreamlike quality next to a reality that was becoming synonymous with the absolutism of effective procedure. When art can no longer take its claims to autonomy seriously, the best it can offer is an illumination of all the ways it is compromised by entanglements with power—tirelessly, confessionally demonstrating itself as an ultimately racist, sexist, elitist institution. Political commitment gave way to ideology critique as the most advanced political aesthetic, a move reflected in other elements of the left as it tried to comprehend the failures of the internationalist workers' movement. The relation between the history of left politics and the avant-garde is beyond the scope of the present analysis, but art's sociologization cannot be understood without reference to the developments of the left in Europe, the shift in centrality from Paris to New York, and an emerging skepticism that the industrial and urban proletariat could become the leaders of a new society. Both the failure of the latter and continuing crises inspired a return to questions of revolutionary consciousness and ideology, as well as more fundamental

reflections on the precise logic and essence of capitalist society. And, what is most important for understanding the contemporary moment, it also provided room for a politics of social identities not based on class. Society as an immanent force to be figured within aesthetic form, while previously replaced with a political *telos*, was now supplanted with art's reflection on its ideological position in society and the vectors of power and marginalization that course through its realm of disenchanted piety.

VI.

Artists and critics finally concluded that art's most advanced progressive function was to express a social identity or illustrate the various ways it is marginalized or disrespected. Identity oriented art did not bother itself with the dilemma that the specific commodity character of artworks in their market functions precisely by delineating and marketing the artist's identity. Unlike other commodities which have a socially general definition of value, artworks can be valued only through being tied to a personality. Art-as-personality had a venerable history in modern art—an era in which there were personalities—which identity art revived to give cultural capital a radical sheen and to re-inject it with a politics it took to be worthy of conviction, i.e., not one based on class as society's ultimate source of misery. In fact, the problem of art's function within capitalism as a whole, the way the experiential power and critical content of image-making is weakened as its form approximates the commodity form, was replaced with a politics that completely lost a grasp on this dialectic. Never capable of fully shaking its tendency toward politics-as-market, identity art's ostensibly critical dimension, a dimension which still plays out in contemporary art, in no way hindered its commodification. It served, rather, as a condition of its possibility. Just as capitalism develops through the production of new needs in its subjects, so the constant production of ever new identity conflicts creates the feeling that politics presses urgently forward. Certain forms of identity politics border on functioning, against their better intentions, as neoliberal forms of anti-racism, sexism, etc. They do not call into question the fundamental parameters of capitalist society, but internalize these parameters in the way they look at identity as a form of capital--as that which is both exploited and worthy of championing. While in its heyday it could make a scandal out of a major American exhibition, today identity functions as the politics of the culture industry's major award

ceremonies. [3] Identity art always bordered on making the artist's persona, transformed into an exemplar of a particular identity position, into a paid advertisement for that particular group's misfortunes. Many artists in this tradition genuinely struggled with this problem, and the result was a critical art of incontrovertible quality, nuance, and humanity. Art's ability to express the critical experience of accumulated injustice returned in identity art's attempt to articulate the specificity of suffering in all its socio-historical and subjective dimensions. The result was an art of universal dimensions. This has given way to a politics of art based mostly in censorious rage and guilt mongering. Identity art's ability to locate particular experiences within the unfortunate universality of suffering has given way to a politics oriented not to *eradicating* generalized misery, but to one that seeks to *take possession of it* as a tool to shame others and fortify divisions. This, too, plays a role in the maintenance of class society—the community of collective humiliation—where even social justice comes to mean its opposite: that we take possession of our misfortune, that we mystify it and make it sacred, and that we comport ourselves to it like property. The way capitalism alienates individuals from one another so that they might confront one another only through the objects they produce is internalized and replicated even in those increasingly rare points that should provide some unity to a class that can no longer experience itself as such. By introducing anti-aesthetic techniques which, in their most extreme forms, petrified artworks into death-masks of progress, modernism struggled against art's inherently affirmative existence as a product of culture and an object of experience. For this kind of identity artist, the problem of art's inherently affirmative existence is an overly speculative and irrelevant philosophical quandary. In its most impoverished contemporary iterations, the genuine anti-aesthetic is replaced with crass ambiguity whose crowning achievement is irony without satire, construction without expression, art without experience. [4] The identity turn is only one manifestation of art's integration to the immanence of society. Artists who take identity to be overly narrow locate a more socially objective frame through a return to conceptualism or the production of art that borders on social research and information design, creating well designed charts of society's negativity. The worst of this results in museum exhibits that take on the aesthetic of a TED talk. Whereas art once allied itself to the liberation of the proletariat, it has since shifted its allegiance either to identity liberalism, canonized French professors and positivist sociology.

VII.

If the transformation described above consists in a broad move from autonomy and commitment to art as ideology critique, then this transformation must be analyzed alongside theoretical changes in the understanding of ideology. One way to delineate these changes is to examine them as the artistic manifestation of critical theory's inability to maintain its specificity against traditional, ultimately bourgeois forms of social theory. The theoretical nuances of this distinction have ramifications for the social philosophy of art. First generation critical theory's focus on the irresolvable contradictions of the capitalist mode of production gave way to social theorizing that takes society as an object to be explained and subsumed to concepts. The sociology of knowledge, cultural criticism, and traditional theory—Scheler, Mannheim, Habermas, Luhman (after Weber) in Germany, Bourdieu, Althusser, Foucault (after Durkheim) in France—provide the broad theoretical armature of this development. Post-structuralism's critique of metanarratives, including that of capitalism's historically directional dynamic as a fundamental concept of social theory, further problematized the grand theory of capitalism as a contradictory, dynamic totality, and one susceptible, therefore, not to any thoroughgoing explanation, but only *critique*. Critical theory occupied a Socratic position with regard to other social theories. If the Platonic dialogue exposed ideology through the philosophical distinction between truth and opinion, taking its task to be the demonstration of contradiction inherent in philosophical reflection, critical theory traced these contradictions not to the inherent limitations of human beings and their faculties of knowledge, but to the material conditions of society. At the same time, it struggled, just as the Socratic dialogue struggled, to elaborate a positive account alongside its critical one. The shift to non-critical social theory implied an alteration in the theory of ideology and, by extension, art's place within it. Traditional theory, typified by social theory as the sociology of knowledge, transformed ideology critique into an apolitical *epistemological* analysis between "conditions of existence and modes of thought". [5] Ideology is transformed from socially necessary semblance, a set of inversions that, while structuring consciousness, are fundamentally a result of the objective social relations typical of societies that produce in a capitalist mode, into consciousness *per se*. Once the mental contents are traced to their social derivation, the analysis is complete. This is not to

be confused with the Marxian critique of the fetish forms of social relations as *both false and objective*. Consciousness of the socio-historically determinate, abstract character of labor as the socially mediating form of wealth is blocked by the very nature of the social relations themselves. Labor's double character as abstract and concrete is taken to be transhistorical, belonging to the ontology of laboring activity *per se*, rather than a peculiar result of labor when it becomes the means of social mediation. Only critique, and not any explanatory theory, can recognize the contradiction between real wealth and labor as the measure of value. The sociology of knowledge converts the politically emancipatory *telos* of ideology critique into an epistemology of mental contents and their derivation. It naturalizes what ideology critique is supposed to see through. Critique, which interprets social knowledge as an expression of an inherently contradictory, objective social dynamic, is replaced with an orientation to ideological struggles within and between classes. It naturalizes the division between mental and manual labor which critical theory ought to problematize. Overwhelmed by metaphysical subtleties, theory grasped for more concrete characters for its story. Bourdieu's work must be located within this transition from critical to traditional theory, even as it is an attempt at a mediation. [6] He combines an objectivistic orientation, emphasizing external, coercive structures confronting the subject, with a Weberian conceptualization of rational practices and ideal types. Social practices constitute the objective structures of society and, on the other hand, these objective structures constitute the conscious and unconscious behavior of individuals in their *habitus*, a dialectic which makes the social world appear to be natural. Bourdieu's theory of a mutually constituting dynamic has affinities with the Marxian conception of ideology, but it fundamentally misconstrues key categories of the critique of political economy. The dialectic in Marx's work is necessary for a thoroughgoing critique of capitalism's contradictory categorization of social relations, but in Bourdieu it is ultimately subsumed to categorizing positivism. For Bourdieu, a concept is useless if it fails to classify and explain observable phenomena and the ever changing power relations. The theory's strength, its emphasis on empirical detail, ultimately gives way to a spatial conception of society—society as a *field*. The dialectical theory of social relations and their conflictual, fetish character is replaced with a spatial conceptualization, i.e., relations constituted by a struggle between different groups for the formation and protection of positions, practices and power. Bourdieu sees *characters* but not *character masks*. Thus the sociologist's subjectivism is

smuggled in—social relations operate by exclusion—even as semi-conscious forms of *habitus*—as opposed to being conceived as forms of abstract domination structured by commodity directed labor. It is no wonder, then, that the fundamental categories that grasp this form of abstract domination, such as value and capital, are precisely those most problematically construed in Bourdieu's analysis. Social position is determined by different forms of "capital" possessed by members of various factions in the division of labor. Capital as symbolic indicator and social positioning, like "power" in Foucault, replaces capital as social subject and substance, self-valorizing value in motion, and the process of endless expansion that regiments all facets of life and nature in societies producing in this mode. Bourdieu, the sociologist of sociology, always reflecting on the conditions of his own field, sociologizes society.

VIII.

This has ramifications for Bourdieu's theory of art. Culture can be synonymous with cultural capital only after the critical category of capital has lost its position in the critique of political economy and when that element of culture which is not reducible to ideology has been disregarded. In social theory, culture wants to assign everything its place, and has lost any claim to operating as a plenipotentiary of a world no longer dictated by a logic heteronomous to things in themselves. Bourdieu's masterpiece—*Distinction*—is the definitive statement of sociologized art, the goal of which is to delineate the hidden determinations of aesthetic preference. By criticizing Kantian aesthetics, Bourdieu argues that the assumption that products of the spirit can be approached as autonomous and self-contained objective moments is a form of power belonging to a particular habitus. The bourgeois can take the aesthetic autonomy of taste seriously only because of the ideological blindness inherent in their class, a position whose consciousness is based on the disavowal of any awareness of the socio-historical emergence of wealth from labor and, by extension, aesthetic production from its concrete socio-historical framework. The Kantian theory of disinterested pleasure, the basis of the aesthetic's ostensibly pure form of sensual contemplation, is, in fact, a social derivative anchored in the bourgeois' "elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world." [7] Culture becomes cultural capital, and the special ideological function reserved for art—that more than anything else it exists

as a sanctuary of the true subject and the private individual—is traced back to objective structures of domination. But sociologized art thus restricts art's ideological character, the way it functions in the maintenance of the status quo, to the sphere of reception. This is a reflection of a propensity inherent in Bourdieu's social theory as a whole.

IX.

This determines the limitations of both Bourdieu's social critique of art as well as his theorization of art's social character. The subjective orientation that predominates in Bourdieu's concept of capital is reproduced in his understanding of art's ideological character. He replaces the insight that culture bears an *internal* relation to the dynamics of value production, and that this dynamic finds its way into the inner character of artworks, with its elaboration as an expression of social position. That culture is not simply one fact among others but possesses, by dint of its location within the real subsumption of capital, a precise and diagnostic object of critique, as well as a fundamental role in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, is lost to an analysis that often amounts to little more than a sociological schematic of the pseudo-differentiation that structures the culture industry. The theory takes as decisive the "nuances in the monotony of supply" [8] within the culture industry, forms of consumption, behavior, and market production which are of objective import for the maintenance of capitalist society and not merely a matter of socially derivative "taste." That the culture industry regiments individuals and defines the parameters of what they are able to experience, that it structures an exploitative economy of affect, that it re-organizes the individual's instincts and sense of inner intuition along the lines of integration and conformity, and that this process takes place as a socially rationalized material force acting *upon* us even as we take it be stemming from our freedom—in a word, everything that makes culture an expression of capitalism's peculiar form of abstract domination—is lost in Bourdieu's theory. This perspective *integrates* the ideology of the culture industry instead of criticizing it. Because everything is fundamentally the same, the minute differences, perceptible only by those in possession of the codes of the niche, become magnified in importance. Bourdieu reflects the regimentation of consciousness, that socialization has "immigrated to its immanent consistency," without understanding this process as part of the way capitalism must necessarily subsume

individuals to its process of valorization or its obverse—that aesthetic experience could amount to the determinate negation of the violent subsumption of the particular to the needs of the universal. [9] It reproduces within the theory precisely the administrative regimentation of taste the critique is supposed to expose: “In an epoch in which bourgeois social science has ‘plundered’ the Marxian notion of ideology and diluted it to universal relativism, the danger involved in overlooking the function of ideologies has become less than that of judging intellectual phenomena in a subsumptive, uninformed and administrative manner and assimilating them into the prevailing constellations of power which the intellect ought to expose. As with many other elements of dialectical materialism, the notion of ideology has changed from an instrument of knowledge into its strait-jacket. In the name of the dependence of super-structure on base, all use of ideology is controlled instead of criticized.” [10]

X.

This problem is expressed most clearly in Bourdieu’s reduction of distinction to a “code,” aesthetic experience as socially administered knowledge distinct from the irreducible, non-conceptual character of experience which philosophical aesthetics claims for it in its non-identity to practical or theoretical forms of consciousness. [11] Bourdieu takes this bit of idealism to be a residue of bourgeois philosophical aesthetics. Bourdieu’s account is indispensable for any attempt to understand the way culture functions as coded knowledge recognizable to a particular group, an insight that finds its most advanced confirmation in the professionalized realm of art today—a division of labor held together not as a manifestation of the most advanced forms of spirit, but rather by a solipsistic reproduction of a set of cues no one outside this professional sphere would independently pursue—a sort of cultural-knowledge ponzi scheme which in its form could be said to imitate capital’s meaningless expansion for its own sake. Not only does it reduce the philosophical-aesthetic concept of experience, previously that through which art’s socially critical character was perceived, to a socially administered form of knowledge, but by reducing discernment to class the analysis fails to recognize how its configuration of culture becomes *another code*. Sociologized aesthetic consciousness not only blocks the possibility of a form of aesthetic experience that might permit the subject to cultivate a capacity for discernment irreducible

to social position, but the recognition of this block, its cynical registering in aesthetic production and discourse, makes sociologization into its status indicator—a standardized response which can be learned and employed in a market increasingly dependent on information. Such a theory proves essential to a generation whose aesthetic capacity for imagining anything different has been systematically handicapped by regimentation, infantilism, and distraction. A code can be applied only to codified works, a fact which accounts for Bourdieu's continued relevance to cultural production today. Art that is not produced solely as culture industry trash to be consumed without experience is in large part produced as a codified set of objects to be interpreted and marketed by a newly emerging class of *critical critics*: "What is forgotten however is the fact that the puzzle of Mallarmé's *La Derniere Mode* is lost by the degradation of the mysterious and the marvelous to the moot and merely misshapen, regrettably championed under the banner of crass ambiguity whose crowning achievement is irony without satire." [12] This coded reflexivity, while it amounts to contemporary art's particular mode of advancement, is also a mark against its quality as well as why it is hated by the reactionary and aesthetically illiterate, who look at its combination of saturated complexity and sardonic blankness with confusion and disgust. This connects an aporia of criticism to art's sociologization. Criticism coupled itself with theory because faith in the autonomy of pure culture, one of bourgeois criticism's preconditions, became untenable. The dynamic of artistic production and judgment by an elite cabal was replaced by cultural journalism and integration to the academy, long since in thrall to theory and other forms of legitimation through professionalized historicism —"Indoctrination camps for the homeless intelligentsia where it can learn to forget itself." [13] Opposed to this is a quizzical everyday consciousness that confronts what seems to be an art world in which judgment is inseparable from marketing, oscillating between a guilt-ridden desire to "do some good in the world" and a reactionary cynical acceptance of its reduction to commerce in a dubiously overvalued luxury market. There is not so much criticism as networking, brand production, and publicity. If it could be said that at a certain moment in the 20th century, "as a result of the social dynamic, culture becomes cultural criticism, which preserves the notion of culture while demolishing its present manifestations as mere commodities and means of brutalization," then this dynamic has been introduced to a dialectic of its own. [14] Just as culture became "cultural criticism" as a way of maintaining the idea of culture against its particular manifestations, compromised by their

commodity status, so art has since internalized cultural criticism at the moment when criticism took on the visage of theory as a new source of legitimation and a palliative for art's guilt and irrelevance.

XI.

"But if stubbornly immanent contemplation threatens to revert to idealism, to the illusion of the self-sufficient mind in command of both itself and of reality, transcendent contemplation threatens to forget the effort of conceptualization required and content itself instead with the prescribed label, the petrified invective, most often 'petty bourgeois', dispatched from above. Topological thinking, which knows the place of every phenomenon and the essence of none, is secretly related to the paranoiac system of delusions which is cut off from experience of the object. With the aid of mechanically functioning categories, the world is divided into black and white and thus made ready for the very domination against which concepts were once conceived. No theory, not even that which is true, is safe from perversion into delusion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object. Dialectics must guard against this no less than against enthrallment in the cultural object. It can subscribe neither to the cult of the mind nor to hatred of it. The dialectical critic of culture must both participate in culture and not participate. Only then does he do justice to his object and to himself." [15]

Bourdieu's social theory of art does not contain any way to distinguish the social effect of art from that of the culture industry. He understands art as a coded form of communication when it is precisely communication that is problematized by art's attempt to overcome the predominance of effect over every other element. Artworks countermand ideology by speaking to the non-reified elements of the subject, not by replacing one ideology with their own. This sets them apart from every other "field" of sociologically explicable behavior. Bourdieu's under-elaborated concept of aesthetic experience leads to agnosticism about the possible objectivity of art over and against society's objectivity. This extends to the possible objectivity of aesthetic judgment and experience. But even on its own terms, i.e., as a critique of ideology, it is inadequate to the socio-historically predominant forms of subjective conditioning and integration. Tracing taste to social position affords insight into

objective factors that condition the subject's ostensibly free forms of reception, but it overlooks the fact that aesthetic incompetence is not monopolized by the undereducated; it infects all layers of society. Cultural proficiency as socially administered knowledge disregards what is obvious today: that "deep down and contrary to its better judgment, the bourgeois character tends to cling to what is inferior," that the aesthetic preference of the bourgeois, like every other class, has been reduced to the same inner qualities of the object buttressed by pseudo-differentiation. [16] This is a problem for all ideology critique along the lines of the sociology of knowledge. The ideational content of ideology is irrelevant when it is no longer conceived as the conditioning of mental contents by social position, but as a totality whose reception is fundamentally indifferent to class, social position, or identity: "The suspicion held by earlier cultural critics is confirmed: in a world which denies the mass of human beings the authentic experience of intellectual phenomena by making genuine education a privilege and by shackling consciousness, the specific ideological content of these phenomena is less important than the fact that there should be anything at all to fill the vacuum of the expropriated consciousness and to distract from the open secret." [17] Ideology now functions as the tendency to reduce all experience to the equalizing parameters of the value form. While Bourdieu is critical of the regimentation of taste, his theory unintentionally functions as a sociological elaboration that would today amount to market research. He begins his book with a quote intended as an exemplar of the cynical, elitist underpinnings of the bourgeois cultural apparatus: "And we do not yet know whether culture can exist without servants." [18] The element of truth in the statement, unfortunate as it might be, seems to have been lost. It is a real question whether culture can survive in a world in which every individual, in private and public life, is reduced to an appendage of objective processes. [19] With the advent of the culture industry, art's possibility became an anthropological question. A more thorough conceptualization of art's place in the maintenance of capitalist social relations cannot, therefore, limit its analysis to the perspective of reception within the division of labor. The move to consider the social dialectic within the objects themselves is motivated by an interpretation of art's form as the determinate negation of the form of works conceived for the production of value. The very concept of reception is problematic when it is synonymous with a set of calculable responses. The culture industry is significant not merely as an impoverished form of culture, a concept which has been illegitimate for decades, but as late capitalism's preponderant

form ideology. Theories of ideology limited to reception gloss over the fact that the culture industry is not merely a smorgasbord of items to be freely chosen along the lines of one's particular predilections, but is a socially necessary, objective force that regiments all individual psychology, leveling it to a moment of the cycle of manipulation and retroactive need. The relations within its products thus have a determinate connection to the commodity form as well as the psychological constitution of late-capitalist subjects, which these products increasingly produce and reinforce. While one of Bourdieu's strongest points is the recognition that art's universality is a lie, he does not recognize how its universality has been negatively reclaimed by the calculability of consumption patterns. Everyone, down to the minutest details of their subjectivity, is a target audience. A critique based on reception likewise fails to make a connection between art's relationship to the individual and the logic of accumulation. Higher forms of art are not immune from this development even when they attempt to bypass art's commodity character. Art that is not reducible to cultural trash still has its own peculiar relation to value, even if it is not in immediate conformity with the general logic of the commodity form. It requires mediation with the concept of personality as the art-commodity's particular condition of circulation, i.e., "identity formation as born from the exchange relation." [20] This analysis is not the same as the critique of the culture industry, but it is not completely separable from it. It approaches the dialectic from the other direction—the subject not as a victim of the external manipulation of needs but rather as the internalization of the alienated essence of the commodity form of value into its own self-relation, expression, and comportment to the world. Only then can we understand Adorno's comment that "culture has become ideological not only as the quintessence of subjectively devised manifestations of the objective mind, but even more as the sphere of private life." [21] Bourdieu recognized that the concept of private life was ideological; *habitus* captures this despite its affinities with the concept of "lifestyle." The sphere of private life as a condition not only of the development of the autonomous individual, but also of discerning aesthetic experience, has become problematic along with its inner connection to the concepts of self and identity. Bourdieu's theory calls into question the ideology of free, individual aesthetic choice as a means of self-creation just as some contemporary art registers it in the way it seems to address a subject that is not fully human. The rebellion on the part of ostensibly higher forms of art against their most crucial social role—as property and instrument of bourgeois interests—is a counterpart to the dissolution of the significance,

religious or otherwise, once attached to it as a form independent of the existence of a market. The division of labor hobbles art's universality. Art is now as much as ever an affair whose inner workings are known mostly by those for whom such knowledge is integral to self-preservation: cultural capitalists and their employees, collectors, and artists struggling to produce demand for their particular brand of semblance. That art is no longer of objective, universal concern has long been recognized as part of its natural-history. Hegel's thesis is now a cultural cliché. Part of the violence capitalism perpetrates on objectified humanity is the production of false needs—a psychological compulsion as the subjective counterpart to the maintenance of objective irrationality—which over time amounts to the impossibility of fulfilling experience. What the culture industry has managed to do is resuscitate in reified humanity the universal need for culture as a form of administered falsehood. That art's most advanced forms, in order to distinguish themselves from this process, become comprehensible only to a sociologically definable set is a social contradiction within art that is not grasped by art's delineation as a *habitus*. Within the purview of capitalism, everything true becomes a dead language spoken by initiates.

XII.

Critical theory's corresponding aesthetic, on the other hand, locates art's role in the expansion of value and not merely as the *modus operandi* of cultural capital, two functions which the critique of the advertised personality shows are inseparable. [22] The question remains whether it can be anything more. The theory of autonomy assumes that through its material elaboration art is able to reject a society that submits everything in existence to a heteronomous logic. Directed by the concept of contradiction, critical theory's philosophy of art implies the possibility that aesthetic experience takes place and is perhaps even specifically constituted by the gaps which emerge in society's failure to resolve its contradictions. In this sense, it would be an aesthetic expression of crisis just as one might interpret the culture industry as society's assuagement of crisis. Modern art expressed these contradictions without naming them, but art, insofar as it develops through self-determination, contains a utopian dimension that points out the contingency of capitalism by merely existing. The recognition that what appears as natural is a second nature flash up in the reflective experience of the contradictions inherent in art's construction. Its

psychological counterpart is the relaxation of the tension of self-preservation, a tension which is today hardly perceptible so much does it pervade the phenomenology of contemporary life. That art is its own corrective to ideology is implicit in the dialectical character of the concept of appearance, pointed out in the early stages of the *Phenomenology*, as an emergence that implies its negation. Just as the argument in that work is driven by the despairing attempts of consciousness—the categorical form of otherness to the object—to grasp its object until it is reconciled with it in Absolute Knowing, so the *telos* of aesthetic experience is the reconciliation of the subject with itself and with the nature within and outside the subject. [23] This places Hegel's philosophy in an even closer connection to art than those who read it as the philosophical counterpart to *Emile*. But if art is an ideology that is able to become more, this occurs when it is able to produce new experience, something that today, for objective and subjective reasons, is a dubious concept. It does so by elaborating its configuration of time. Relations based on the preponderance of abstractions over human life, mediated by value as the hegemony of abstract time, are replaced with a form of self-relation wherein the work's elements stand as an objectivated complex not determined from without. The experience of the transformed time sedimented in art, obvious in all its major forms, is the establishment within art of time as the determinate negation of abstract time and, by extension, society mediated by labor. On the one hand, this makes art a cultural imitation of the being-in-and-for-itself of natural things, specifically the natural-philosophical concept of life. Art conjures the language of nature without vacuously reflecting it. On the other hand, if art's method of relating to society is by appearance as negation as well as reflection, it does so not by mirroring society or by impotently pointing out its falseness, but by constituting a semblance world over and against the existing one. The development of expression through its attempt to resolve its antinomies registers the contradictions of capitalist society without explaining them, making it the aesthetic counterpart to critical theory's taboo on any non-contradictory theory of society. [24] It amounts to an imitation of nature's self-moving and self-generating autonomy as well as society's existence as a second nature, a petrified overgrowth. From this perspective, art's relation to society becomes ambivalent, so mediated with its opposite does it become.

XIII.

"For while the mind extricated itself from a theological-feudal tutelage, it has fallen increasingly under the anonymous sway of the status quo. This regimentation, the result of the progressive societalization of all human relations, did not simply confront the mind from without; it immigrated into its immanent consistency. Not only does the mind mould itself for the sake of its marketability, and thus reproduce the socially prevalent categories. *Rather, it grows to resemble ever more closely the status quo even where it subjectively refrains from making a commodity of itself.* The network of the whole is drawn ever tighter, modeled after the act of exchange. It leaves the individual consciousness less and less room for evasion, preforms it more and more thoroughly, cuts it off a priori as it were from the possibility of differencing itself as all difference degenerates to a nuance in the monotony of supply." [25]

Sociologized art lost this utopian dimension by taking bourgeois society as its only horizon. It reflects the way commodity society informs everything but does not see through it. Society becomes an absolute and art becomes, against its better intentions, a second order form of ideology even as it attempts to reflect its ideological character in itself. The same limitations of Bourdieu's theory have immigrated into sociologized artworks. Just as the gap between ideology and consciousness disappears in the sociology of knowledge, so for Bourdieu the "more" art harnesses from the beauty of nature when it "appears to say more than it is," and that through which it is able to become more than a registering of the status quo, is reduced to false consciousness. [26] The obliquely conceptual, ineffable, and socially irreducible quality of aesthetic experience is replaced with explanatory power, cultural *habitus*, and the maneuverings of cultural capital. The analysis is complete once the social cues are traced back to their context. One perspective is no better than any other, and the social content contained in art is addressed in a positivistic manner—as *information*. This is reflected in Bourdieu's famous charts. This type of analysis is indifferent to any non-superficial concept of form—either as a sedimented sociohistorical seismograph or a bearer of non-standardized experience—categories which, if they were ever appropriate to art, have today become compromised as another set of taglines in the schema of cultural capital. Bourdieu's theory, like the society it wants to explain, is capable of integrating even what seems to be its antithesis; radical autonomy is another ploy for the advertised personality:

“the prerogative of the society of the generic is to perpetually reproduce the innovatively unique for greater and greater yield, displacing conformity as an inadequate concept for comprehending its dynamics.” [27] Sociologization became a form of regimentation. Whereas previously society was figured in works as a set of forces transfigured in their construction, that which allowed them to become something more than is the case, sociologized art made society into a theme. This change influenced art’s inner character as well as its expression of social truth. Not only has art’s social content, which exists in its form, been reified, but it has also reified the very element of its object—movement—whose contradictory dynamics it previously reflected. By trying to faithfully reflect society, it lost its grasp on it. Even art’s resistance to society now operates as a schema. From all angles, art’s “sociality” has taken on characteristics of an i*dée fixe*. Just as the rat man had his stone, so artists, critics, and theorists cannot but position themselves and their objects in ever more mediated, nuanced logics of art’s ensnarement in power. By introducing into its orbit reflection on the social situation and its place within it, art risked overwhelming itself immanently with what it ultimately opposed. Like atheists who cannot stop speaking about God, art cannot stop pointing out its guilty place as a passive moment in the maintenance of the status quo. The sociological outlook operates with such ubiquity today that it borders on constituting contemporary art's *a priori*. Contemporary art’s desire to endlessly demonstrate art’s ideological status makes it as monotonous as the commodity culture it only half-heartedly tries to distinguish itself from. The expression of suffering, the historicity of nature, the *illusions perdues* of the bourgeois subject, these are either naive relics or fodder for the culture industry.

XIV.

Only once we all to some extent became Bourdelian could his theory gain its greatest claim to truth. If topographical thinking could never grasp the myriad ways art transcended its narrow social-theorization, today art’s socialogization has in fact reduced it in many cases to precisely the social registering and codification Bourdieu claimed it was. “The materialistic transparency of culture has not made it more honest, only more vulgar. By relinquishing its particularity, culture has also relinquished the salt of truth, which once consisted in its opposition to other particularities.” [28] If his theory was not true then, it has become so

now that art has integrated his insights. Only when art became a form of social theory could the narrow conceptualization of it from that perspective conform to it. Artists who do not have some understanding of social critique, in however muddled a sense, seem capable of capturing the most advanced networks of the contemporary art market only when they function as a sort of heritage brand. Today the remnants of critical social theory are part of the very cultural capital Bourdieu was outlining in *Distinction*. But whereas Bourdieu was trying to prove that an appreciation of art as a sphere separated from the mundane and practical was precisely its socially ideological function, and thus a form of domination, today the opposite is the case. Cultural capital lies in a socially critical attitude to art, an ironic knowingness and canny manipulativeness of its ideological character. Much has been said about the collapse of criticism conceived as the disinterested judgment of a work's aesthetic properties. Sociologized criticism was not wrong to call this form ideological. But even today, after the death of the great generation of "theory," the integration of its insights into criticism is so complete that it often serves as little more than jargon for publicity statements. Today artists are theoreticians and critics of their sphere of activity. They've co-opted not only the job of the critic, but the social theorist of art as well. It is no longer bourgeois era "art criticism" alone that can be used as a tool for the production of a discerning consumer base. The move from disinterested art criticism to social theory inflected "critique" has by no means saved criticism from this compromised role. The 'critical' sociology of art is itself another schema to be employed for pseudo-differentiation and the creation of new demand—for instance, of artists whose work allegedly problematizes art's "commodification." The artist's bothered conscience, stemming from the inevitable commodity status of their work, and attempts to advertise its disenchanted status as nothing more than an object for sale, both function as new value-indicators. While a "loss of self-evidence" probably characterizes all art since its removal from the realm of magic, it takes on a manifest, existential significance in modern art's preoccupation with its ideological status, its dubious existence in a world where *Geist* is expressed in the movement of capital alone, where the social relations that constitute it appear as an immutable second nature. The integration of aesthetic consciousness is a social-theoretical *demonstratio potissima* of art's loss of self-evidence. It confirms this uncertainty with the acuity of scientific method. Added to art's guilt at being a weekend escape for the bourgeois, it is also shown to be an essential weapon of social stratification. Before Bourdieu traced

taste to social status, Veblen elaborated a theory of conspicuous consumption that is true in a sense it did not intend. Art's utopian dimension is inseparable from its uselessness, and the entire realm of authorized culture could be said to be fueled by people paying more than something is worth. But art's uselessness is also inseparable from its existence as apparition—an object of experience that is incommensurable with previous, standard experience. Once the element of art's alterity is removed, it becomes, for those able to afford its luxury options, an investment opportunity and a conspicuous display for the production of prestige. Bourdieu confirmed this function with the seal of scientific evidence.

XV.

What might be abstractly defined as the source of radical aesthetic experience, that residue of romanticism, and whatever one wants to call that moment in art that overwhelms consciousness, provokes anxiety and is therefore neither widely sought after nor considered desirable. Concepts such as non-identity and the new have also fallen under the taboo on effort during leisure time. The profiteers of the culture industry in all its diffuse manifestations, the administrators of high culture and its reception, all these play a role in making this kind of experience impossible. The experience of the teleologically ambivalent emergence of the incomprehensible from a nexus of recognizable moments, like a firework which erupts after the momentarily extinguished streak of its ascent, has been replaced by the demand for didactic material and the collection and display of exotic, abject, and puzzling objects. The logic of so much contemporary art seems to be to prohibit art's expressive qualities, as if the aesthetic experience it is supposed to provide is *passé*—an easier judgment than that one is simply incapable of producing it. In both cases, the "new" is something to be recognized and swiftly integrated, not something to be experienced through an immanent working-through of an artwork's construction. It is a trend, a cue, a piece of ornamentation. It mostly functions as a means of differentiation in the market, a piece of publicity that has immigrated into the artwork itself, a plug for its meaningless aesthetic existence. Art is not to be judged too harshly for this. Society demands that art work for a living and its administrators are tasked with finding a function for it when aesthetic experience is deemed an insufficient deliverable for its allowance. Perennially embarrassed by its uselessness and weary of its other creative friends always footing the bill

for lunch, art assuages its guilt in the unfortunate but probably accurate presumption that it offers a civic education not to be found anywhere else. A trip to an art museum often feels like a slightly more bewildering, less satisfying sojourn to a museum of natural history—the attendant gathers information about a group, an oppressed identity or form of life, or is subjected to moralizing about social facts she somehow already knows or could come to more directly in another form. There are sociological and psychological reasons for the transformation of art into an ersatz political education. The individual is tired, weak, and objectively speaking, replaceable. Nevertheless, the long tradition of guiltlessly force-feeding the population trash might finally have overplayed its hand. Now that healthy eating habits have made their way into the common culture, it is perhaps time to give the higher forms a human face as well. There is a nagging suspicion that we have gorged ourselves, and the responsible among us are in the market for more nutritious forms of entertainment—something that art, with its resumé of slightly more highfalutin activities and its primitive accumulation of cultural capital, is equipped to provide. The decimation of funding for art in public schools, the fact that art teachers are the most fungible species in an education profession that becomes uglier with each passing year, does not hinder the determination of art institutions in their passionate struggle to bring art to people who do not want it. Spare time, as a counterpart to work-time, rescues the subject from boredom without requiring a concomitant effort of concentration. This remains the dual requirement of entertainment despite the fact that an entire intellectual and academic industry is based on mining the nuances of the culture industry. Concentration must be harnessed for the blessedness of the work day, at the end of whose ceaseless and interminable, but ultimately meaningless tasks, the individual’s mind is left feeling like the woolly mush that will later be shoveled into his mouth at feeding time. The model of aesthetic experience today is the overworked creative industry technocrat feasting in open-mouthed transfixion on a series of documentaries on social and political issues. New material emerges with minimum effort, giving the impression that the individual has not yet been fully reduced to the animal nature that would probably amount to a preferable form of life in any case. Art’s guilt is assuaged along with the dread that any sensitive person experiences upon waking, for the aesthetic-educational experience of the previous evening gave us something to take home with us, something to reflect upon during the hour-long commute to work.

XVI.

There is something fundamentally contradictory between the objective tendency of social theory and the parameters of artistic production and reception. Always geared to the particular, the details of formal construction, art cannot but confront the subject as an individual. That artworks are expressive in a way that resists their assimilation as instruments of objectification is one of the primary factors distinguishing them from the culture industry. The expressive element has been problemlematized in recent art, largely because it is interpreted subjectively, as sentimentality. Social theory, as Durkheim took pains to demonstrate, concerns what is not reducible to psychology or human intention, those elements of objectivity, forms of domination and behavioral patterns, which stand over and against the individual, irreducible to conscious volition. The orientation to the individual, the bourgeois subject, seems to be an irreducible aspect of art. Contemporary art struggles with this insofar as this subject no longer exists. It is idealistic to assume that aesthetic experience is only directed at how human beings could be and not the state we have been reduced to. This element of utopianism risks falling behind as a residue of the enlightenment—a form of naïveté against which socially disillusioned art struggles. That some contemporary art has replaced its orientation to individual experience with an appeal to identity formations or a vague, mute, non-subject is paradoxically part of an attempt to remain adequate to the state of the subject in late capitalism. The era of surplus populations—the massification of whole portions of the proletariat tangential to legitimate access to the wage—makes the short phase of radical bourgeois subjectivity—and with it the epistemological purview of radically autonomous art—appear a brief intermission. The attitude that still believes in the naïveté of autonomous art appears conservative because it implies the relinquishment of control when it is control, calculability, and a faithful submission to the logic of the present cultural dynamics that intellectuals and artists cannot abandon without the legitimate fear that they will not survive. It is not and never has been what art can tell us about society that draws us to it. The tendency for leftists of a certain sort to stake a position on art and its theorization is so ubiquitous that it should analyzed, as Durkheim once analyzed suicide, as a *fait social*. That art cannot but find ways to maintain its enigmatic character even as it is saturated with conceptuality, that even in the critical reflection on its role in society it nevertheless contains the dream of nature—this is what

ultimately draws those who want to see the present social form come to an end. There is nevertheless something embarrassing about introducing, at this point in art's history and theorization, a convoluted defense of autonomous art. The concept hardly makes sense anymore, not to mention that art's resistance to society, the resistance implicit in any activity that develops its spontaneous logic not fundamentally reducible to exchange, has never disappeared. It receives an *apologia* it doesn't need. The sociologization of art is by no means absolute; it is perhaps in transition to a minority position, a genre with a relatively short history. That art is not reducible to any social theory is obvious to anyone who tries either to produce it or become consciously sensitive to the features of its peculiar modes of expression. It would be hard to outline a better framework for the resuscitation of "criticism" than that it "not stop at a general recognition of the servitude of the objective mind, but seek rather to transform this knowledge into a heightened perception of the thing itself." [29] If art can be said to have any purpose at all, its purposelessness might be said to provide an experiential corrective to ideology no longer as a set of manipulative mental contents but as total experiential debility. Just as the psychoanalytic *telos* is to help the individual move from neurotic misery to everyday unhappiness, so art's most utopian element might be to provide the feeling of transient escape for the trapped subject. This aspect does not make for interesting copy, nor does it provide a sweeping framework to categorize and subsume what might be taking place. It is also too vague or abstract to be acceptable to contemporary consciousness as a legitimate politics of art. But in the contemporary moment it is not difficult to feel how problematic art has become. This is a contributing factor both to its sociologization as well as the manic, paranoiac quality that seems to characterize its sphere in the division of labor. There are too many other problems on the horizon. Art is based on the luxury of leisure time, something that is disappearing from life. Art might do itself a favor by admitting that it isn't helping anyone instead of safeguarding itself by making self-satisfied reference to the fact that, while it cannot escape its guilty infidelity to truth, it at least recognizes that it has a problem. The more significant problem for art is that it is no longer even providing an experience. Art now appears conservative when it merely allows for the relaxation of the objectively ludicrous tension of self-preservation that still governs daily life—precisely that which prohibits experience that might allow culture to become a dream of something other than death. It is to the resuscitation of this experience that the social critique of art ought to direct itself.

Footnotes

[1.] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 250.

[2.] Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002) 164.

[3.] This was intended as a reference to the 1994 Whitney Biennial, but the 2017 Biennial has proven that identity remains an area of contention.

[4.] Zac Dempster, Eric-John Russell, Veronika Russell and Nicholas Vargelis, "Who, or What, is John Kelsey? A Postscript," *Mute*, June 12 2014, https://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/who-or-what-john-kelsey-postscript

[5.] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge. 1979), 70.

[6.] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1975), 188.

[7.] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 5.

[8.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 29.

[9.] Ibid.

[10.] Ibid.

[11.] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 46-51.

[12.] Zac Dempster, Eric-John Russell, Veronika Russell and Nicholas Vargelis, "Who, or What, is John Kelsey? A Postscript," *Mute*, June 12 2014, https://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/who-or-what-john-kelsey-postscript

[13.] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Sociology of Knowledge and Its Consciousness," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 49.

[14.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 27.

[15.] Ibid, 32.

[16.] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 235.

[17.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 29.

[18.] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 5.

[19.] Max Horkheimer, "Authoritarianism and the Family Today," in *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper, 1949), 361.

[20.] Zac Dempster, Eric-John Russell, Veronika Russell and Nicholas Vargelis, "Who, or What, is John Kelsey? A Postscript," *Mute*, June 12 2014, https://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/who-or-what-john-kelsey-postscript

[21.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 29.

[22.] "Theses on the Personality," Cured Quail, https://bogplot.blogspot.co.uk/p/1.html.

[23.] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 65.

[24.] Ibid, 5.

[25.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1981), 20.

[26.] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 78.

[27.] Zac Dempster, Eric-John Russell, Veronika Russell and Nicholas Vargelis, "Who, or What, is John Kelsey? A Postscript," *Mute*, June 12 2014, https://www.metamute.org/community/your-posts/who-or-what-john-kelsey-postscript

[28.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1981), 33.

[29.] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1981), 31.

Do We Live in a Society of the Spectacle?

Paul Mattick

Is contemporary capitalism the society of the spectacle that Guy Debord described in his book of 1967?

This question is worth asking because the terms of Debord's description of present-day capitalism have been—as he predicted they would be—absorbed by the dominant discourses of cultural and social criticism. In the humanities and particularly in art writing, reference to "the spectacle" is everywhere; it has eclipsed the earlier fixation on Benjamin's "aura," and compared to the Situationist catchphrase even the pessimistic jargon of Theodor Adorno, with its powerful gravitational pull on academic culture-mongers, is fading in influence. Nothing could, of course, have been more antithetical to Debord than this kind of "success."[1] In his view, by the 1960s art was long finished as anything but pseudo-critique or simple commerce, while for sociologists and social and political commentators generally he had nothing but contempt.

Still, the ubiquity of the concept of the "spectacle" demonstrates neither the accuracy nor the inaccuracy of Debord's understanding of society. While he himself insisted that "a general theory calculated [to fight the war of freedom]" must be "perfectly unacceptable," it must also "first of all not appear obviously false …"[2] Its acceptability does not, however, prove its falsity.

The positive reception of Debord—at least of his vocabulary, if not of his analysis in its totality—is in part explained by the kinship of Situationist theory with a central strain of Western academic social thought. Debord's contrast between precapitalist "community" and a society which is "a mere sum of solitudes" (§70, 46)[3] is a distant echo of Tönnies's contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, the contrast that structures the mainstream sociological tradition. The changes played on this dichotomy in the social thought of the 1950s—by writers as different as C. Wright Mills and Randall Jarrell—are strikingly close to Debord's focus on the decline of earlier working-class values, the emergence of leisure as

a new arena of alienation, and the cultural centrality of consumerism. (Debord's debt to Henri Lefebvre's exploration of similar themes is well known.)

While thinkers like Mills are today largely ignored by adepts of the spectacle, Debord's version of these ideas has gained particular acceptance because of the way he linked them to the newly socially prominent mass media through his signature concept. Thus he equated the loss of "the former unity of life"—meaning both the collectivity of *Gemeinschaft* and the coherent experience of an individual—with the replacement of "all that once was directly lived" by "mere representation," which becomes "the official language of generalized separation" (*Gesellschaft*) (§1, 12). The images broadcast by the spectacle are "detached from every aspect of life"; the original coherence of a society or a life is replaced by a fictional totality assembled from representations of selected aspects of life. These fragments come from "news or propaganda, advertising, or the actual consumption of entertainment," an activity structured by the relations between images (§12, 13). In this way, "lived reality" incorporates "the spectacular order" (§8, 14). Such descriptions are bound to ring at least somewhat true to anyone who lives in our world, saturated by media imagery—now with the addition of the internet and cell phone--that can seem to provide the only vocabulary for understanding experience.

Thus Debord took a great truism of popular sociology and social criticism, the shift from production to consumption as basic to individual identity in post-1945 capitalism, and gave it a unique twist. He described the move from one economically determined identity to another, from activity to passivity, as shaped particularly by the practice of spectatorship. This spectatorship is not limited to the simple act of watching television or going to the movies. One seems to be what one appears—and not just for others: in a literalization of Riesman's "other-directedness," one seems to oneself what others *see* in one's choice of clothing, haircut, car, or friends, all selected from the array of signifiers presented by the media spectacle. In this way the concept of "spectacle" is also a version of the critique of "mass culture" central to the dour view of contemporary society shared by a range of ex-leftists, from Dwight MacDonald and Clement Greenberg to Theodor Adorno. Where they differ is in Debord's abandonment of "high art" as a realm of resistance to commodity culture; in his view, with the artworld success of Surrealism in the late 1920s, art itself had

become part of the dominant spectacle. For Debord—and this is the heart of his efforts around 1960 to move the Situationist International away from its earlier involvement in avant-garde art activities—resistance to the commodity could take place only in actual politics, even if the main political activity open to a small group like the S.I. was that of writing.

The spectacle, unlike mass culture, has a directly political significance. As a pseudo-unity assembled from social fragments, the spectacle functions not only *like* the modern state, "which, as the product of the general form of the social division of labor and organ of class rule, is the general form of all social division" (§24, 20), but as a key component of its activity: the state rules through the spectacle—through mass rallies, television appearances of "leaders," actions calculated for their symbolic value (like American military adventures intended to reverse the "Vietnam syndrome"), and so forth—as much as through the army and police. And like the state, the spectacle is a product of "the reigning economic system," (§28, 22) which, starting with the "separation of worker and product," (§26, 21) culminates with the submission of all individuals to the movement of commodities that makes up the economy. The logic of the commodity "is one with men's estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce" (§37, 26).

While this analysis of commodity production and the state forms it has brought with it derives, of course, from Marx, Debord stakes a claim to originality with his temporal location of the society of the spectacle as a particular era of capitalism: it "corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life" (§42, 29). While he does not specify that historical moment, it is clear that he is speaking of the social order that emerged in the wake of the Second World War. More exactly, one form of spectacle, the "concentrated," emerged around 1930 in the forms of Stalinism and Nazism; afterward came the "diffuse" spectacle which, "urging wage-earners to choose freely among a great variety of new commodities," represented "the Americanization of the world …"[4] The first form represented "the moment when an *image of the working class* arose in radical opposition to the working class itself" (§100, 69). The second form is "capitalism in its affluent stage," (§105, 74) when capitalism produces "so great an abundance of commodities … that a surplus 'collaboration' is required of the workers": in

addition to producing they must also consume (§43, 30; see §64, 42).

The concept of spectacle, that is, incorporates the Keynesian ideology of the mid-century period: the idea that capitalist prosperity now, at any rate, rests on mass consumption. The two forms of spectacle have in common therefore not just dependence on falsifying imagery but also a state-managed (to different degrees) economy (another idea that Debord shared with thinkers of the time, including, on the ultra-left, the much-despised Cornelius Castoriadis). What was hailed by the then political-economic orthodoxy as a triumph of capitalism, with its provision of material wealth for all, reappeared from a negative perspective as the soullessness of consumerism, with interpersonal bonds broken by the individual pursuit of commodity-satisfied pleasures (in the Freudian terminology of Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, for instance, this idea appears as "repressive desublimation"). Debord speaks of "the falling rate of use value" (§47, 32), in evident contrast to the falling rate of profit central to Marx's analysis of capitalism as a crisis-prone system; here it is the inherently dissatisfactory nature of commodities, not capitalism's inability to sustain accumulation, that both powers the endless striving for more of the same and can potentially lead to rebellion against this system of forced consumption. Even while rejecting a general contrast between "pseudo-needs" and "authentic needs," because all needs are socio-historical, Debord insists that "the commodity in the stage of its abundance attests to an absolute break in the organic development of social needs." In place of the "organic development" of past history comes the "mechanical accumulation" of commodity production run amok: another venerable pair of oppositions put to work in specifying the present moment.

Debord was not wrong to speak of the "Americanization" of world capitalism: the outcome of World War II was indeed the economic and political dominance—at least over the "West"-- of the United States. It is also true that the vast surge in labor productivity accomplished during the war years and afterward made possible a striking increase in real wages for American and, eventually, European, Japanese, and other workers. Beyond this, the illusion of a possible unbounded accumulation and unbounded production of goods was fostered generally by the fact of the Golden Age, as economists call it, that characterized world capitalism between the end of the war and 1973, a period of exceptionally high

growth rates, absolutely and per capita, in the industrialized nations. It hardly needs to be pointed out these days that capitalism seems to be still as susceptible to old-fashioned crisis as ever. But already by the late 1960s economists had noticed a slackening in profit rates, and the collapse in growth after the mid-seventies was inescapable. Soon enough, far from being required to consume, workers saw wages stagnate and even decline, while unemployment rose sharply in Europe and to some extent in the U.S. By 1990, Japan had entered into something very like a depression. The supposed consumer society, it turned out, was rather short-lived. It was the *idea* of a shift from production to consumption as socially central that lived on.

This is not enough reason to throw out Debord's concept, however, for it can still be argued that the population of capitalist countries remains mesmerized by the spectacle, even if its promises are increasingly unfulfilled. We will return to this in a moment. First, however, it must be said that the idea, which Debord shared with many others, of a deep kinship of the Soviet system with so-called Western capitalism has been borne out by history, though he had it backwards: "planning," in the West, turned out to be mostly illusory, while the state-run systems became ever more embroiled, through debt and trade, in the capitalist world market. Further, one cannot quarrel with Debord's location of the origin of Stalinism in the original Bolshevik state established by Lenin and Trotsky with their party of "professional revolutionaries." On the other hand, one feature of the really-existing "concentrated spectacle" seems to have been the lack of belief in it—especially after 1956—by people who experienced it first hand: it was not so much Muscovites, East Berliners, or Poles as Western intellectuals and leftwing activists who believed in the socialist state. And one could hardly describe that state, with its endless queues and archaic bribery system, as successfully colonized by the commodity. The idea that both forms of spectacle lived by exploiting the working class is certainly true, but otherwise the parallel Debord drew between them is not convincing.

How much of Debord's analysis holds for today's capitalism? Apart from all the reverential quotation of that single term, "spectacle," I am aware of only one serious attempt to deal with this question: a volume published ten years ago by the San Francisco collective Retort under the title, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War.*[5] Focusing

on the current combination of atavistic brutality in the service of economic interests with a modern politics of imagery and appearances, the Retort authors argue that the state, ever more imbricated with the economy it is increasingly called on to manage, has come “to live or die by its investment in, and control of, the field of images” (2005, 21). Consequently, “the present condition of politics” makes sense only when “approached from a dual perspective—seen as a struggle for crude, material dominance, but also (threaded ever closer into that struggle) as a battle for the control of appearances” (Ibid, 31). Like Debord, at least before 1968, Retort sees a political weakness in this entanglement in imagery become essential to both economy and state.

Like Debord, these authors assert that the spectacle is “a structural necessity of a capitalism oriented toward the overproduction of commodities, and therefore the constant manufacture of desire for them …” With the “colonization of everyday life” by the commodity spectacle, “possessable and discardable objects do the work of desiring and comprehending for us, forming our wishes, giving shape to our fantasies …” (ibid, 178). In Debord’s paraphrase of Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism, the spectacle “is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (§4, 12). The problem is that such a “social process that is hollow at the core,” to return to Retort’s words, produces a society “of loosely attached consumer subjects, each locked in its plastic work-station and nuclearized family of four.” (2005, 21) This in turn produces what Retort—employing another late-‘50s truism—calls a “weak citizenry,” without “those stronger alliances and identifications,” like nationalism or corporate allegiances, “which the state must call on, repeatedly, if it is to maintain the dependencies that feed the consumer beast” (ibid, 34). It is this civic weakness that, the authors believe, might provide an opening for Left politics.

The image of work and family conjured up by this analysis seems to be the product of people who know little about either the reality of work life or contemporary family structure. Similarly, the picture of an atomized citizenry, much like that of solitary bowlers conjured up a decade ago by public-policy expert Robert Putnam, is quite distant from reality. To take a single but salient example, it ignores the variety of forms of social contact developed by computer-literate young people. “Commodities are now all that there is to see,” Debord asserted in *The Society of the Spectacle*; “the world we see is the world of the

commodity" (§42, 29). But this is no more true today than it was in 1967. Just as the four authors of *Afflicted Powers* themselves, I am certain, see much besides commodities—their relations with each other and their discussion group, their relationships with lovers and families, and the political questions that interest them—so do even the most impoverished members of society as well as those still able to make a good enough living to spend it on camcorders as well as housing and food. It seems to me that it is not in the supposed weakness of social bonds but in people's repeatedly demonstrated capacity to mobilize their social relationships in defense of perceived interests that any possibility of a future revolutionary politics resides.

Retort's analysis is equally unconvincing with respect to what it considers the state's dependence on imagery, central though pictures and pageants indubitably are to political machinations of all sorts. Exhibit A, according to *Afflicted Powers*, is 9/11, as event and image: Just as the Twin Towers were an image of financial capital as well as an actual place of business, so their destruction was "designed above all to be visible" (2005, 26) as an attack on capitalist modernity itself. And because of what they claim is the central role of spectacle in the current mechanism of power, the authors say, "The state was wounded in September in its heart of hearts and we see it still, almost four years later, flailing blindly in the face of an image it cannot exorcize, and trying desperately to convert the defeat back into terms it can respond to" (2005, 25). The chief example of those terms was, of course, the American attack on Iraq.

But in fact the image of the burning towers was quickly turned into an image of united America, even as the American government used the occasion to launch a long-desired war. The fact that this war did not go very well reflects not the difficulty in finding the image of victory "the war machine has been looking for" (2005, 35) but the actual limits of American power in the Middle East. The Retort authors assert that the spectacle is not only "the key form of social control … but also a source of ongoing instability," (2005, 189) because "too much of the texture of everyday life is captured and circulated" by image-machinery. But this is to place too much weight on imagery, as either stabilizer or destabilizer of the social order. Contrary to popular belief, it was neither television coverage of the Vietnam War nor student demonstrations against it, but the actual inability of the U.S. to defeat the

Communist army at an acceptable cost, that ended that war. Similarly, the pictures from Abu Ghraib went around the world without much impact on the war or even on the practice of torture, despite the fears and hopes of interested parties that they would amount to political dynamite.

It is not surprising that ancestors of the critique of the spectacle, such as Matthew Arnold's lament for the displacement of an authentic culture embedded in time by the cheap commercialism of industry, or Theodor Adorno's contrast of the human meaningfulness of modernist high art with the false emotionality of commercial culture, are still taken up by writers and professors. Views of this type, after all, celebrate the particular social role claimed by such people as the remaining representatives of civilized values in a darkening world. The popularity of Debord's version must, in contrast, rest in part on the increasingly visible place of formerly high culture within the market system, as well as by the declining possibility of deep belief in political ideology. But it must also be its distance from the detailed reality of social and political life that renders it available for use, contrary to Debord's intentions, in art writing and sociological ruminations.

It would, however, be wrong to reduce Debord's work to its current condition of intellectual touchstone. It is notable that one element is generally left out of even the more politically engaged contemporary reception of Debord's analysis: his location of the alternative to the spectacle in the governance of society by associated workers' councils, an idea whose importance may not be evident to those no longer in thrall to Leninist politics, to which it provided the chief historical alternative.[6] It is, however, exactly in this element that Debord's attachment to the basic terms of Marx's analysis of capitalism and its future antithesis resides. And it is this attachment, as well as his attempt to specify the current condition of capitalism, that gives his book its evident power. Although we do not actually live in the society of the spectacle as Debord describes it, the conclusion he drew from his effort to understand the contemporary world remains basic: that "the very evolution of class society … obliges the revolutionary project to become *visibly* what it always was *in essence*" (§123, 89-90)—the recreation of social life by the producers themselves. Despite appearances—the common idea that we live in a "media society"—Debord's critique of representational politics is more important than his critique of visuality, and the aspect of his

thinking that will last the longest.

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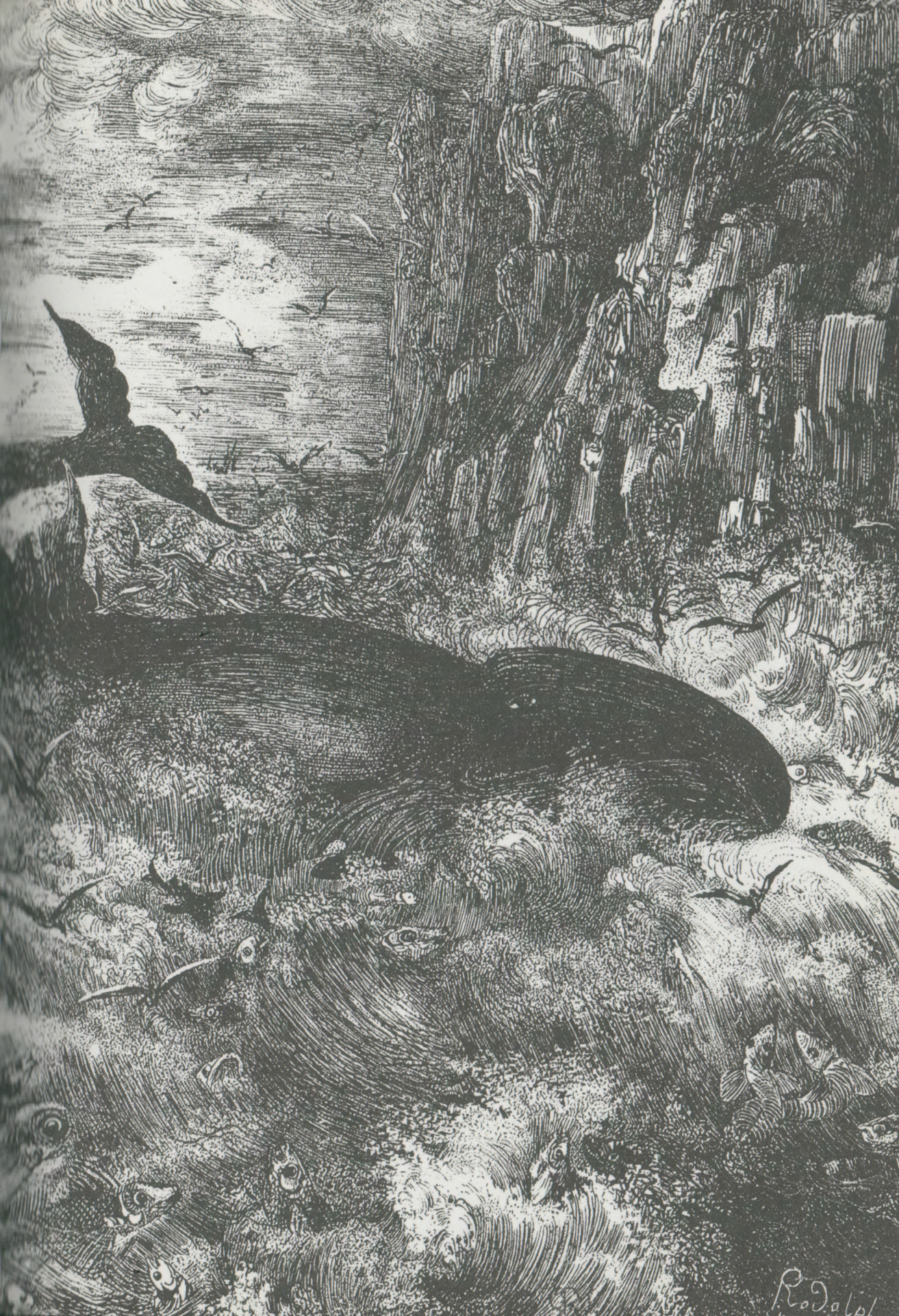
Footnotes

[1.] See the excellent survey in Gianfranco Marelli, *L'amère victoire du Situationisme* (Arles: Éditions Sulliver, 1998).
[2.] Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* [1988] (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 129.
[3.] References are to the translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith: *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995). I give the number of the section of Debord's text, followed by the page in this edition.
[4.] Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* [1988] (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 21.
[5.] Iain A. Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005). For my review of this text, see http://brooklynrail.org/2005/12/express/a-riposte-to-retort. Retort's reply can be found at http://brooklynrail.org/2006/02/express/whither-jeff-wilson-retort-to-paul-matti.
[6.] Try, for instance, to locate this concept in the 492 pages of Tom McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).


Rodolphe

Iconoclastic Idolatry: Speculations toward an Image of God, the Meaningful Process-Marks of Labor, & Purposefulness without Purpose

Jeffrey Schultz

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. — Genesis 1:27

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. — Proverbs 21:3

Objective beauty, which served as the central category around which aesthetics circled from antiquity up to the nineteenth century, is not now so quickly invoked in discussions of poetry as it once was. Indeed, we are far more likely to find beauty invoked in discussions of high-end consumer economy commodities—*this is a beautiful bag, a beautiful pair of boots; this is a beautiful cheese, a beautiful piece of technology*—, than in discussions of contemporary poetry. This is a measure not just of poetry's or beauty's conceptual decay, but also of contemporary experience's alienation from what might truthfully be called beautiful and poetic. When Keats wrote that "beauty is truth [and] truth beauty," the first waves of industrialization had already forced those qualities out of imagination's immediate, material experience and into the frozen fiction of his Grecian urn's mythic ever-presentness. Beauty's inability at that early date to withstand any encounter with time itself reveals Romanticism's not-yet-recognized encounter with modernity and anticipates Baudelaire's attempt to bring this encounter with the modern to the forefront of consciousness through the representations of *Les Fleurs du mal*. Keats's world was already, as Hopkins would write a half century later, "seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil." This toil, which for Hopkins "wears man's smudge and shares man's smell," is nothing other than the universally instrumentalized labor that has come to characterize modern experience in the age of global capital; it is a type of labor separated utterly from the idea that labor might work toward anything but a furtherance of the relations that have stripped it of its transformative power. The material beauty of the beautiful bag, of the beautiful pair of boots, is nothing other than a masking of the objective misery and suffering of their material provenance, their manufacture, their conveyance, and, ultimately, their disposability. Leather is never far from

slaughter, which, in the modern economy's ecologically unsustainable and ethically vile model, has earned the connotations its name has accumulated, never mind the environmental damage caused by the tanning process itself, the conditions of the workers who produce the goods, the carbon emissions and chemical contaminations associated with global transport and so on and so forth, as far as the horrified imagination will take us. It is the phenomenon of reification itself that is the beginning of the decay of objective beauty: by concealing the socio-historical and socio-ecological truth of made objects behind their very objectivity, behind the seemingly unquestionable nature of their materiality, their thingness, reification, which is nothing other than a severing of critical, dialectical thought, nothing other than a failure of the mind to find the representations that would be able to truthfully situate the mind's own limited experience inside of objective reality, collapses utterly the Keatsian ideal: beauty, at least as it is traditionally conceived and popularly understood, is a lie, and we find lies beautiful. Sadly, this is for the most part all we know on Earth, and, from the point of view of the concealing lie, from the point of view of the reality which the lie conceals, all we need to know.

Against the evil of reified labor, of labor separated utterly from any objective end, Hopkins invoked the power of the Holy Ghost to renew and refresh the world, to remake, to labor in order to continually remake the world in the image of God's grandeur. That it was the good Jesuit Hopkins whose sonnet turned so clearly on the dialectic of labor is telling: his "toil" is nothing other than labor's character when it is taken up into the spirit of Weber's so-called Protestant work ethic. Catholicism's good works, a sort of labor meant to be undertaken in the image of God and as a temporal manifestation of God's presence in the body of the church, of this presence's power to transform the material conditions of the world in the spirit of objective meaningfulness, risk being stripped of their moral value in the Protestant displacement: with the individualization of, the personalization of the relationship with objectivity, the moral value of labor becomes disconnected from its communal, collective, social, and indeed objective value and is reimagined as nothing more than the subjective fulfillment of a subjective ideal, an ideal which can only rise beyond itself to the extent that any given laboring subjectivity has risen beyond itself. The Protestant model, in other words, encourages not "good works," where the moral value of labor is connected to that labor's positive effect in a socio-material context, but rather "good work," which locates

value in the subjective effort or sacrifice of the act rather than in the ends the act brings about; this is certainly not to say that such “good work” could never also be objectively moral or meaningful work, but that, rather, there is no such moral demand in the individual subject’s relationship to individual work. It is precisely this potential for relativism, for the severing of the dialectic, for the triumph of universal exchangeability—the idea that any work is as good as any other, or anyway that any work’s good can only be measured in quantifiable terms of remuneration—that is the functional logic of the modern economy, and it is in this way that, certainly to his great dismay, Luther’s attempt to remove mediating factors from the particular’s relationship to the universal would eventually, at the level of the socio-cultural imagination, participate in collapsing the universal so utterly into the particular that the universal would effectively no longer exist in any universal sense. No voice spoke on its behalf but the voice of the subject and no image represented it but the image of the subject. The idolatry that the Reformation arranged itself against only moves, with the Reformation, closer to home, and so the nihilism that Nietzsche feared would flow from the death of God preceded the announcement of any such death in the very moment that allowed absolute subjective identification with God: Luther, not Nietzsche, opened the door through which the great abuses of the *Übermensch* would later wander.

Or at least he opened it further. The tendency towards this absolute identification of subject and object is already inherent in the Jewish tradition’s looking forward to the coming of the Messiah as “one like the son of man” and becomes, with the Christian realization of Jesus’ corporeal, material divinity, only a single failure of mediation away from catastrophe. Each in its own way, the Abrahamic religions have all had to struggle—and it may be possible to reimagine theology as the history of this very struggle—with the question of the distance between, the gulf separating, subjective and objective images: understandings of particular existence and universal truth. The implications of such a struggle are astounding: the authoritarian strains of religiosity atheists point to as a positive source of evil in the world, as the supposedly positive proof of the failure of religious faith to become objectively meaningful, as the supposed proof of the evil of orienting faith toward objective meaningfulness, are not a failure of objectivity, but rather a failure of the subject’s mediation with and imagination of that objectivity, a failure, specifically, to recognize what the non- identical aspects of both the subject and the object in fact are, a failure, in other

words, to recognize our distance at any given point in history from what is beautiful and true. As the primary historical-cultural mediators of faith, our religious institutions themselves have shaped the contours of this struggle, and it is in this shaping that we find its intersection with aesthetics and with the objective state of beauty: the prohibitions placed upon the mimetic representation of the image of God, the prohibitions placed upon the materialization of the concepts of utter truth and beauty, of the image of unadumbrated objectivity itself are meant to and do in fact structure and limit the possibilities of the individual's relationship with art, with culture, with material experience, and with the very concept of the universal. While any brief survey of the various stances the Jewish and Christian traditions have taken in regard to such representations will necessarily be grossly incomplete and oversimplified, will necessarily not touch on the richness of the traditions of various sects and denominations and factions, a fact which is of course just as true of Weber's analysis of Protestantism, it may nonetheless be useful as a way to recognize the broad contours and general tendencies of these traditions' histories in this regard, as well as in regard to the dominant social forces of their times, which is of course just as true of Weber's analysis of Protestantism. In these tendencies we will also find the fate of the beautiful to this date, and, hopefully, the possibility of its freedom from that fate.

The Jewish prohibition on graven images attempts to make itself complete and fundamentally binding as a basic tenet of faithfulness; it comprises the whole first movement of the Ten Commandments and reveals the core character of the Judaic relationship with the divine, objective, and omniscient. That the creation of material images of God, the speaking of the name of God (and thus the materialization of that name through the musculature of our vocal apparatus, the vibrations of sound waves as they travel through the molecules of the atmosphere), and the acknowledgement of any other divinity are each specifically tabooed points to the difficulty of creating and preserving a monotheistic model in a world swirling with animism, polytheism, and any number of local deities, not to mention the physical objectifications of the guiding principles of all these same. In order to remain elevated above and separate from alternative deities, in order to maintain the claim to being the one true God, the image and name of the Jewish God had to be kept utterly distant from the physical, experienced world, had to be kept out of human hands, and, indeed, out of human minds. And it was precisely this quality of being beyond human

experience and beyond human imagination—beyond, that is, the human capacity for image-making—that then granted the Jewish God such enormous power, and it was then precisely this unimaginably enormous power that opened human imagination and experience to the distance between where it found itself and what would be completely meaningful and true, what could not be imagined, but what imagination was compelled to move in the direction of. Unlike polytheistic systems, which imagined themselves as allegorical in relation to human experience, the Jewish God's motivations—and this is a feature perhaps best exemplified in *Job*—are both real and utterly ungraspable, utterly unimaginable. In this way, they open the space of contemplation; they focus the imagination on its own horizon. And in this, they imagine themselves towards the faint glow of a utopia that suddenly emanates from beyond that horizon. God's ungraspability, God's very beyondness, turns out to be the quality that might both bring humans closer to God and reveal the ways in which God permeates every aspect of human experience. The prohibition on naming or otherwise materializing by placing into form the shape of objectivity itself is also a prohibition on our own unwavering certainty in our imagination of and relationship to truth. By situating the convergence of the beautiful and true beyond the realm of humans' powers of image materialization, imagination was forced to begin probing at what material possibilities could exist beyond the material realities that bind us at any given moment. In the prohibition's enforced distance from objectivity, hope for all that is beyond the reach of the moment's objective circumstances is born. This is the inherently critical and dialectical moment in Judaism: forever imageless, God remains, no matter what humans might have done or found or accomplished, beyond us, and in this, we are compelled to not rest with what we've discovered or undertaken or accomplished, but rather to insist on moving, always, through inward reflection, through negation of the given's necessity, closer to the truth, which, precisely because we are separate from God, is not and cannot be identical with what we now are. God's imagelessness is a demand that God not be reified, not be degraded in the imagination to the status of a thing, not be made into a mere answer or object of wisdom. Imagelessness asks for a process of engagement and a reflection that must move inward before it can project itself outward, and it creates a God as capable of evolution as humans and human society are. Indeed, the way in which Jewish scripture accumulated gradually over time is a testament to the changing understanding of God in the human imagination. What contradictions exist in Jewish scripture ought to be read as remnants of reflective

revision in the people's historical-material understanding rather than as either the illogic of faith or what must, elaborately and against all logic, be forced under the hand of a subjectively authoritarian interpretation to find the appearance of reconciliation. If God is life, and if God is going to be able to go on being life, if God is to go on—against Nietzsche—living, God must also be allowed to change, and for that to become possible, humans must be willing to let their image of God die so that a truer image might, and only momentarily, emerge. Plato's dissatisfaction with the poets is at root the same—and points to the fact that Israel began working through the problems of idealism well before Greece—: a momentary and contingent reflection of a reflection is not to be trusted as the object of transcendent truth. And yet, as not even Plato could escape, reflections are necessarily what we have to deal in: the genuinely dialectical, which transcends mere argumentation's necessarily authoritarian moment by engaging in the mediation of representations of consciousness, is itself, in its reliance on representation, mimetic and reflective in nature. But what the largely successful prohibition on graven images in the Jewish tradition could not control were the images that arose from the language of scripture, images that, as the prophetically transmitted word of God, were lifted out of the stream of time through which they arrived and granted the status of permanent and unchanging truth under the concept of law. It is this status itself which required the creation of the priestly class, of those entrusted with or who appropriated for themselves the task of interpreting the esotericism of a text which at first glance seems to be full of contradictions in need of formal reconciliation. Moses struggled—and during a time, scripture tells us, when God was much more forthrightly present to the people—with what seemed to be the perpetual curse of the chosen people: to forget entirely the image of God and therefore to fall away from it, sometimes spectacularly. Unmediated, the distance between humanity and the absolutely imageless God was too much to bear. The image of God as law was the Jewish compromise, but legalism—which is nothing but a reification of the law, a renunciation of the law as something that moves with the spirit and a degradation of it to mere and minor rules—follows from all law at the moment law is lifted out of time and anointed with the aura of the transcendent, at the moment when people forget that eternity too must know change, it being the sum of all moments, and all moments being subsumed under the flux of change. When the law became written in stone, reification of the divine had taken hold completely.

With Christ, this tension between on the one hand the temporal and corporeal and on the other the eternal and imageless was given a voice with which to speak for itself. The image of Jesus served—and it would be, much later, Vico and then Hegel who would recognize and begin to elaborate the underlying system of this—as an image of the universal mediation of the subject and object. Christ's unsettling of what had become settled law was a call for the spirit to be freed of the legalism that had come to contain it, and, in that his image provided the faithful a foothold in their imaginative reach toward the unimaginable, an image that claimed to be both fully subjective and fully objective, he was a call to once again realize and reflect upon the distance separating every other particular and the universal. As the Catholic tradition evolved from the structures of the early church, the separation from the vernacular was meant to and necessary to maintain the image of this distance. Here, as the Earthly representatives of non-identity, of the distance between the particular and the universal, the priestly class found the potential for its purpose. Divinity, suddenly capable of corporeal, human manifestation, suddenly given human image, was no longer utterly beyond material and historical experience; while this allowed reified law to be reevaluated and re-immersed into the movement of time, it also threatened to bring divinity too close to experience, and to collapse, in that way, the great image of hope—that the absolutely divine need not be imagined as utterly and forever beyond human reach—Christ offered. Against this threat, the separateness of the priestly class from mundane life, the solidity of its rituals, and the hiddenness of its day to day functioning served to hold back too-close contact with the divine, which, in this world, had to be visible, but, in the life of the day to day, not yet realizable. High Renaissance art's idealized human forms and the idealized light it cast upon these forms, its clean and never-blemished flesh, its preternaturally calm and distant facial expressions are this separation's most accomplished mark on the visual arts: such art's beauty could not then and cannot now speak directly to the matters of our actual experience; it could then speak only figuratively, as the figure of our longing for experience's idealization, and it speaks now only in the minds of cultural conservatives, speaks of a longing for what we've supposedly fallen away from, all that which we, in fact, never possessed and were never meant to imagine as in our immediate possession. The Neoplatonic thought that was so influential to this Renaissance idealization could only truly flourish as such, could only approach its ideals with such great tenacity, after the Jewish and Platonic prohibitions had been loosened by Christianity's incarnation of

the ideal. The space of contemplation the Judaic tradition opened became in this way a more fully imagined space, a space populated by images, all of which pointed to the distance between the reality of Earthly, human life, and the image to which all life aspired; the metaphysics of both crude medieval moral allegory and Dante's subtle and complex figural structuring are mimetic of this dialectic of image, this realization of the presence, even in the smallest detail of our daily lives, of the shadowed and incomplete reflection of what would be truly meaningful.

Yet it is in the turns of this dialectic that the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation takes form. Luther's critique of the opulence and corruption of the Roman Church was, finally, a critique of the universal image as it was mediated through the hierarchy of the universal church. The problem with the universal image as it was offered by the universal church was not, as Calvin mistook it, idolatry, was not the problem of the mimetic act itself, but was rather that the image of the universal had become in danger, through Earthly misrepresentation, of not reflecting a God worthy of worship, of not reflecting a true God. In the hands of the priesthood, the image, and the priests themselves as the representatives and representations of the image, the priests who in that way became image themselves, did not reflect a God that had detached itself from sin, a God that had made itself in its own true image, a God that lived up to its own ontological proofs; such a God could be nothing other than universally empathetic, humble, and good, but this was decidedly not the image of bishops offering indulgences for sale. When the Word became flesh in Christ, and when the priestly class took its position as the mediators of that Word become flesh, that Word, for all intents and purposes, become image, hypocrisy, which is nothing more than falling short of the image one claims to represent, became the universal charge against Christianity. Protestant iconoclasm, whatever plastic and visual arts it may have directed itself against most forcefully, was, in the end, an attempt to shatter what it perceived as a faulty image of the true church, a reflection, a mediation, that had become too distorted to any longer hold on to its claim to truth. Reformation iconoclasm functioned as a sort of hammer-borne ideology critique: against the reification of the Roman Church, it reawakened a reflective relationship to image so that the contemplative space between subject and object, a space that by this point had become filled with the most vile lies, could begin to be reimagined. But what, beyond Luther's universal priesthood, became the iconoclastic rationality of

Protestantism in general would eventually still the dialectic of the universal image into a cold binary of piety and hypocrisy precisely because it prohibited the production of new images. When this dialectic collapses, the spirit is stilled, and the image of objectivity is imagined subjectively as identical with subjectivity's image of itself. The subject no longer measures itself according to a standard it recognizes as beyond itself, a standard that might contain the possibility of universally realized subjectivity, but rather measures itself merely against its own self image. The individual, on the very cusp of modernity—and this is absolutely necessary for the modern to unfold as it has—, becomes spiritually isolated, incapable of imagination beyond the horizon of selfhood. And it is this isolation that marks the moment at which secular social life begins to overtake the church's ritual function as the center of meaningfulness. Denied a sense of meaningfulness beyond the self, our own manipulation of the image of ourselves, of the image we reflect outward to others, becomes the primary locus of our sense of meaningfulness. In this way, the iconoclasm which sought to destroy those idols which made imperfect mediators of objectivity, makes, finally, an idol of the self. Our relationship to images changes fundamentally: we no longer seek to reach toward an image that is beyond us, rather, we become the image itself and in this way we become more and more conscious of the crafting our own images. We become our own, as we say now, brands; we become, in our own imagination, products that, in the terms of contemporary academia, and, indeed, contemporary experience generally, must "go on the market" in order to make something of ourselves. This collapse of the universal imagination, and not any sort of spiritually based work ethic, is what allowed Protestantism to flower so fruitfully at the dawn of the modern economy: when the universal church could no longer sustain its claim to universality, when each individual's relation to the universal gained the potential for particularization, culture itself lost its universal orientation. This is true whether one happened to be in a Protestant or Catholic country: awareness of the collapse of universality becomes the universal, no matter how each individual imagines his or her own relationship to it. And this is not a question of any particular moment in Protestant doctrine or in the Protestant faithful's piety or hypocrisy, but rather of the universal decay of universality, of the fact that universality became subjectivized, and, by our moment in history, radically so. With no access to an absolute beyond the self, the subject's ability to materially craft its self image becomes itself the measure of meaningfulness, the image of success, the image of the objective to which we are supposed

to apply ourselves: we seek to transform nothing but ourselves, and we seek to transform ourselves in the image of the individual who has become free to transform. Enlightenment freedom, freedom which we supposedly have so much of and value so highly, became objectively meaningless at the moment it suffered this conceptual collapse: we are free to remain unconscious of the fact that we ourselves are neither universal nor universally realized, are not, in this moment, meaningful beyond ourselves and are not free to become so. We have become the great unconsciousness we have made of what was once God. In the worst possible sense, the universal priesthood has been realized. The modern idea of modern humanity is a sort of art without beauty: a terror of techniques that reaches toward nothing but the perpetuation of its own meaningless individual manifestations. This is the inversion of Kant's supposed Copernican Revolution in thought: in the modern cultural imagination, the image of beauty is what has purpose without purposefulness; to reorient the present to Kant's terms, beauty and truth have been stripped of their dignity so that a price tag could be attached to them.

Kant's original formulation, that what is beautiful is what has purposefulness without purpose, brings us back to the nobler impulses of the Reformation. The Protestant stress on salvation by faith alone was meant to function as a renunciation of subjective purpose, was meant to strip the subject's immediate self-interest from the choices individuals necessarily must make about the performance of the day-to-day, to free our interests of those purely selfish ones so that we might truly serve what is higher without ulterior motive, so that we might be oriented only by our particular relation to the objective, and indeed so that we might become fully conscious of the contours of our own unique relation to objectivity. Kant's purposefulness without purpose is aesthetics' doctrine of salvation *sola fide*: the particular moment or incarnation of beauty must never work to sustain itself, but rather it must work to extend its reach toward the possibility of realized universal beauty, a possibility that would necessarily eclipse and so extinguish the particular moment. To the extent that Protestant iconoclasm focused on the destruction of falsified images of objectivity or else images of objectivity that, inside of time, had grown false, the 16th century already bore witness to the tensions that would erupt in modernist aesthetics and modernist politics at the turn of the 20th: what lies had come to be accepted as true, what lies demanded the acceptance of their truth, had to be destroyed. All such images, which as

imperfect reflections of what they purport to reflect amount to nothing other than the cultural manifestations of ideology—and it is against these, much later, at the dawn of the supposedly postmodern era, that Debord would level his attacks—, impede our reach toward objectivity by distorting, confining, and collapsing the contemplative space that separates us from what would be meaningful. Calvin's view of predestination, a view he could have only attained through the destruction of the notion that the isolated individual's claim to meaningfulness might ever become transcendent, reveals the great span of his reach outside of himself and towards objectivity: predestination does not negate free will in time, it only views it from a perspective that contains all time; the simultaneity of these views, the apparent contradiction between them, is resolved into the subject's power to negate the self and enter into the objective of which the subject was always necessarily always also a part. The destruction of those images that make claims to transcendent wisdom is necessary in order to approach wisdom of the transcendent. But Protestant imagelessness, because of the endurance of and the intimacy of the image of Christ, is not Jewish imagelessness. If alienation from the objective was the great curse of the Jewish people, then complete identification with the objective was Protestantism's. This is the moment Christianity must ever grapple with: to bring the image of objectivity so within reach of human experience it becomes graspable without collapsing objectivity into the image of the subject entirely. Protestantism—both as and apart from its various divisions and tenets and followers—lacks or rather forbids an image-set for the objective powerful enough to prevent this collapse at the level of the whole society. It lacks, in other words, the power to offer images that provide a universal orientation at the social and not merely individual level.

This—the utter diminishment of the universal's reach when it is built from within the confines of a subjective image, is what risks, beyond faith, beyond the faithful, and at the level of the whole society, the disappearance of the idea that the universal might be anything more than the isolated individual at all—is what capitalism found and extracted surplus value from in Protestant thought, but it is nonetheless also where there exists the potential that we might recognize the tremendous gap between the image of a truly universal subject and where we as subjects find ourselves now. The collapse of objectivity reveals in isolated subjectivity the bad universal, the universal that could never imagine itself as anything more than the subject: the collapse, in other words, reveals hell, which, as Lowell saw clearly

enough, resides not elsewhere but rather in each of us. Such is the basis of the society we find ourselves in today, and such is the basis of the culture that makes and remakes this society in its own image. The cultural implications of the Protestant prohibition on idolatry are arranged against the image of beauty, and the prohibition is itself, no matter what Protestant cultural conservatives might protest, no small factor in the social death of the traditional conception of the beautiful in art. The severing of image from objective meaningfulness, from its integration with the institution of that meaningfulness, a meaningfulness that, if its integration of truth were ever to be fully realized, could only be imagined as infinite beauty, was much-lauded by the modernist avant-garde as the moment of art's realization of autonomy, but that moment in fact left art with nothing to attach itself to but the objective meaninglessness of universal fungibility, with the image of empty, meaningless modern existence. What we recognize in modernity as the decay of a universal orientation, each of the Abrahamic traditions recognized in their prohibitions of idolatry as the fundamental problem of both visual and object culture. That it was precisely such a culture that would eventually become dominant and find its highest expression in spectacular or consumer capitalism points to the strength of the spirit that guided the Abrahamic traditions as well as the contemporary world's weak identification with that spirit. This problem, this fundamental problem, is in the imaginative stasis to which such cultures are bound and what is therefore the great difficulty of representing both the movements of time and consciousness through their media, and it is exactly the ease with which atemporal and unconscious representations might be made through them that makes them suitable to function as the dominant cultural media of late capital. The chickens of McLuhan's "the medium is the message" come home to roost when we learn that the message is that we are not meant to be active in the passage of our own lives, not meant to become part of the living spirit. Which is of course not to say that plastic and visual media cannot or do not carry the marks of such representation, the marks of time and consciousness; in fact, they necessarily do carry these, but tremendous effort is involved in the conscious recognition of them, conscious recognition being necessary for both the conscious composition of the representation and the interpretive reception of it. All idols hold their truth, but that truth is often so esoteric, so purely subjectivized in its manifestations, so ignorant of its own mediations, that it goes unrecognized, even by the idolizing subject itself, it long since having confused itself with objectivity. This is why

people can still listen to and love Beethoven's symphonies without feeling the horror for how far we—and not music but we, as what listens—have fallen into our own delusions. Cultural conservatism, inasmuch as any remaining conservatism has any remaining interest in the arts, is false when it advocates a great return to the cultural relics of a past more congenial to those who espouse it, but finds its truth in the idea that, if culture in the broadest sense is not to become merely identical to the meaningless laboriousness of our experience as it is ordered by the economy—and we must remember that cultural conservatives are among those few who still invoke beauty as a criterion for art, and that, if Kant's idea of beauty and his idea that beauty must be subjectively limited are true for anyone, it is the bourgeois of whom Kant was the first philosopher—then all peoples everywhere must be given the opportunity to become among those who take part in the spirit of great culture. In its reach towards objective meaningfulness, the recuperation of a great culture would be the revitalization of, among so many other things, what we now, hollowly, call patriotism, which is as it stands merely a symbol of the objective decay of culture itself. The national spirit Hegel trusted so deeply, the indulgence of which led us into the horrors we still struggle to imagine even as we are immersed in them and their aftermaths, can only now be imagined as a yet-formed material possibility that lies somewhere out beyond the bounds of material objectivity: discovering, at this moment, the constitution of a human, humane society seems as likely as discovering Atlantis, and yet it is nonetheless the structures of such a constitution and the language of such a society we must strive after if we hope to strive after anything even potentially meaningful.

The role of a humane language in any just or more just structuring and culturing of society cannot be overestimated. Language, because it is necessarily tied up in the direct representation of conceptual consciousness, is perhaps more suited than visual or plastic media for the composition of those complexes of representation that might resist their own reification and possession, and because of the danger its potential poses to culture as we have it, we see the culture's arrangements against the actualization of such possibilities in the contemporary atomization and commodification of language as it exists, for instance, at the core of all so-called social media, and, indeed, in the consumer media generally, as well as a simultaneous degradation of the language arts as they begin to shape themselves uncritically inside this commodification and atomization. What is not written in a style that

is absolutely and brutally straightforward in its certainty of its self-identity is seen as nothing more than a waste of time, when in reality, and as Proust and Joyce recognized so clearly, the non- identical and contradictory truth claims of anti-authoritarian representations are actually a route towards the expansion of subjective, qualitative time into a more full self- consciousness, not an “explosion” of, but an inflation or an inhabiting of time which, as representation, serves not as a token of something that can be known absolutely, but looks towards the momentary and transformative experience of our encounters with the semblance of absolute, momentary knowledge, of the absolute knowledge of a moment.

The atomization of language into commoditized units, each exchangeable for the other—for instance an individual tweet’s individual value as measureable by its “favorites” and “retweets” —, mirrors the collapse of objectivity into subjectivity. Attempts to construct larger representations are decried for their supposed “difficulty,” which is nothing other than a measure of the difficulty of looking beyond one’s own perspective in this society, or else for their audacity, their refusal to limit themselves to the positive portrayal of nothingness; serious effort in artistic composition is discredited by the empty cry of “elitism,” even though a serious art would have no interest in preserving the structures that allow for an “elite.” It is of course true that the collapse of the object into the subject does still allow for the existence of a diversity of subjects, all of whom might maintain their claim to objectivity —indeed, genuine diversity of perspective, even if it can no longer recognize the objective truth that the fact of its existence points to, is among the signs that spirit is not itself yet entirely eliminated: in the desire to better one’s own circumstances is the seed of a better world; subjective want simply must become contextualized—, but, because of the readiness with which subjective identification turns toward the authoritarian when its objective mediation breaks down, such subjects actually do tend toward an objective identification under the concept of the atomized, meaningless, exchangeable individual. The expressions of such individuals constitute what is now the dominant style in American poetry, whether it imagines itself as mainstream, avant-garde, or post-something: each in its way asserts the identity of the non-identical, each locates its meaningfulness in a positive understanding of the exchangeability to which everything has been reduced. It is in fact the non-identity of what passes for identity, the meaninglessness of what we have come to understand as meaning, that must be expressed, which is to say that we must take great pains to compose

the image of our tremendous distance from objectivity, from true meaningfulness, from true beauty, but, in order to not fall directly back into the nihilism such an expression would have to fight its way out of, our images must also and simultaneously express the hopeful possibility of subjective reconciliation with objectivity; they must, in other words, orient us towards what is so far from, but what is yet not unimaginably beyond, our reach.

But what is not unimaginably beyond our reach is not the end of matters. Every moment in history, and every particular perspective inside of its moment, looks toward its own distinct horizon of possibilities, and we may not see beyond this horizon without entering into the realm of delusion, we may not imagine, that is, a final, static end-point to our striving, our laboring, without entering into the realm of delusion. What we may do is extend ourselves toward our horizon, and as we move toward it, the horizon itself will of course extend, revealing in this extension new possibilities, closer contours of the truly objective. What we need to be constantly reminded of, and what artists and poets must find ways to represent, is the exact and utter distance between where we find ourselves at the moment and our horizon of possibilities, our orientation and relation, that is, to the objective, which is not and cannot be conceived of, from our perspective, as a static end-point. We have not, as the supposedly postmodern would profess, lost objectivity, but rather we have lost sight of it in the imageless distance that has grown up between it and us. Positive theology, at this moment in history, is as beyond our cosmological horizon as positive art is beyond our aesthetic horizon. Like an image of God itself, beauty and truth, conceptually, must not be forced to conform to our image of a final, definitive shape, must not be forced to be other than they objectively are, must be allowed to be, that is, free, even though each will necessarily and must necessarily become attached to images the moment they enter and emerge from our conceptual imagination. The problem of the mimesis of the non-corporeal and non-physical, of the conceptual and universal—and all of the figures that range around personification have been no small part of this process's historical manifestation, and for good reason, since we only understand these things as they become manifest in or through us—is among the chief problems facing art today. This is a problem that has certainly not been solved by, and has more often than not simply been obscured by all that which goes under the banner of "conceptual art." Not only must the conceptual be represented, but it must be represented in the never-ending process of its transformation. What can be imagined as immutable simply

because it appears to not be material must not only be materialized by the imagination but furthermore must be suffused with time and judged according to its history and future. The transformation of God's image over history tells us that we do, in fact, create God's image. If we are made in it, it must also be made in us. So much as we extend ourselves toward its truth, it extends itself towards the most full realization of its truth. It is in universal change then, change in time and consciousness as well as in material, and moreover, in the marks of the tremendous labor necessary to represent this change, where the concepts of beauty and truth reside and might find their representations: though we cannot represent objectivity and objective beauty in and of themselves, though these will forever remain beyond our comprehension, the semblance of objective beauty can be reflected out into the world through the marks of the sort of labor that would be necessary to work toward it in actuality; such labor, which would be the objective fulfillment of Kant's purposefulness without purpose, is the semblance of objective freedom. That is the truth of purposefulness without purpose: what will move us toward the realization of truly objective beauty is the representation of the great labor undertaken for interests other than subjective gain, great labor undertaken for the realization of beauty and truth itself, great labor which will necessarily fail to achieve the objectivity it desires, but which is undertaken nonetheless, objectively purposeful in its reach, but without objective purpose in the subjective limits of its abilities. We must make the image of striving towards God, towards truth, towards beauty, an idol neither of self nor other but of continual self- negation in its movement towards otherness, an image which can only be constructed negatively in the image of our distance from what we desire, but which outlines the momentary contours of true objectivity in the shape of what it negates, and then, this labor undertaken, we must immediately be willing to move on, move further toward what orients us, destroying or discarding or letting die our last image at the moment it becomes a hindrance to our progress, the moment our consciousness of historical or material conditions render it untrue. Any binding of, any confining of the imagination of the infinite must be cast off as necessarily incomplete, and yet we must, because we cannot but, nonetheless imagine it and all of the possibilities our reach toward it might bring about. Hope requires idolatry. Sustaining hope inside of the real unfolding of time requires iconoclasm. Faith gives us the strength to continue in each. Iconoclastic idolatry must come to function as our basic attitude toward what we thought we knew and move us, through the representations we make and our subsequent destruction of

them, in the direction of what we could know; we must become adherents of an anarcho-materialist epistemology, members of a Universal Church of Real Protest, modernists.

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This attempt to construct something vaguely resembling an Adornian materialist theology of mimesis will of course remind us of Adorno's own hostility toward the theological. But it is, I would argue, Adorno's late-career turn toward a sustained consideration and recuperation of metaphysics, as well as the paratactic presentation within which he struggled to form these considerations and recuperations that constitute, and, indeed orient, the terrible beauty of his own "late style." It is in the collision of materialist realities and the possibilities of a materialist metaphysics that dialectical thought and aesthetic experience reach their greatest heights. Or rather, it has been. Jonathan Culler's recent *Theory of the Lyric* offers this approximation of the dismissive swipe we might expect from contemporary readers regarding Adorno's "On Lyric Poetry and Society": "It exemplifies a dialectical thinking that is easy to mock."[1] Where any memory of it at all remains, this attitude toward the dialectic is widespread enough; the triumph of the phenomenological-existential jargon of intersubjectivity—which of course inserts itself perspectivally at the very same trans-subjective, which is to say, objective position it strives so assiduously to conceal from reflection—has all but silenced the dialectic in what I suppose we would have to call "mainstream" theorizing. But like so many things we consider ourselves beyond, "post-," the reality is that we have regressed from advanced dialectical theory, reducing theory, in the process, to a means without any discernible end, or any end, anyway, outside of the perpetuation of what happens to be the case. Adorno's overt and sustained turn toward metaphysics in the mid-60s was the necessary and only conceivable form of praxis he might have undertaken in the face of the utter disintegration of the possibility of meaningfulness he witnessed during his lifetime. Needless to say, conditions have only continued to deteriorate. It is only through a salvaging of the most advanced, fluid, living, capable dialectic—what is now so often dismissed as quaint and embarrassing while simultaneously being completely misunderstood, reduced to an impossible definition of itself—that an orientation toward the universal, and thus the possibility of hope for a better world, might persist. By turning toward the theological in an attempt to recuperate a dialectical and

materialist aesthetics, I will surely stand accused of turning toward repression, regression, or both. But the structures and figures of positive theology, their aesthetics of mystery and revelation, especially as they are elucidated for us in the beautiful work of Erich Auerbach, stand ready for negativization, ready for that turn that might allow some not-deluded sense of the universal—distant, shadowed, never to be known but always to be sought after—to reemerge and in the process reveal to us the utter and absolutely unnecessary catastrophe that is our history, our moment, and our future, to reveal this to us with the clarity that might finally make it real to us, real enough that we might even hope to find some way of acting in this world to change it, even if only ever tentatively, moment-to-moment, the horizon far-off, hazy, and the possibilities of consciousness—consciousness which, we must strive to reflect upon at every moment, is itself a matter of material arrangement, a possibility of matter in the right arrangement—changing, shifting in the far-off haze, and, dare we hope, even advancing. The hope that is contained within these metaphysically-minded and theologically-derived figures lies in their capacity to achieve a non-destructive simultaneity in their representations: they are capable of capturing the contradictions inside which we live without any false resolution. The challenge facing poetry today is to develop the figurative powers that will allow for the composition of such representations. With only a little serious effort of reflection, the poet can grasp the objective and material reality of such a simultaneity: that the contemporary poetry landscape is formed within the ideology of identity (no matter how “fractured” or voided of “authenticity”) testifies to it. The turn in thought necessary to imagine this range of “identities” from a perspective capable of conceptualizing them in their relations is one of objective self-recognition and -negation: in the renunciation of what we have come to think of, objectively, as identity, lies the possibility of recognizing the objective web of relations in which the ideology of identity is forged and perpetuated. It is a somewhat further leap to negate the necessity of that particular web of relations in their material objectivity, but to do so is to be able to begin to focus the imagination in the direction of material possibility, in the direction of the possibility of an objectively meaningful material organization.

Theology’s hobbled irrelevancy stems from the renunciation of its magical past, from its concessions to the empirical and positive. But if the figures of the theological can be re-envisioned inside of their necessarily image-making, necessarily mimetic moment, and if

they might thereby once again engage the dialectic of their mimesis, we may find a chance to shake them free of the reification that has stilled them and strip them of the authoritarian character that has come to bind them, thereby freeing once again the most powerful figures of a universally oriented culture human history has ever known. Culture has always been a form of magic, a sleight of hand by which we create and orient ourselves. But immersed so deeply in the magical, so deeply lulled by, as Adorno would say, the spell of it, we have lost sight of the trick and mistaken it for the positive and binding truth. The negativization of the theological constitutes a sort of demystification, yes, but one that reaches toward all that remains genuinely mysterious, all that lies at the impossible-to-imagine intersection of the beautiful and true. Tremendous artistic labor, a great purposeful, purposeless labor, is necessary to the composition of any poem, any art at all, that desires to probe at the possibility of all we understand as impossible, and it is only in the marks of such labor that the poem retains any beauty whatsoever; this—which can be achieved only through great seriousness and mastery of the aesthetic situation—is the figure for which anything that aspires to art reaches: the simultaneity of this and the otherwise, the possibility, therefore, of that auratic beauty of good work—an “aura” which is nothing other than the materialized evidence of material consciousness’s reach toward beauty in the aesthetic object itself—becoming objective in this material existence.

Footnotes

1. Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 331.

Agree to Disagree

Eric-John Russell

1.

Part of the lost legacy of the Baroque is a situation in which despite all peculiar ornamental effort, the center seizes attention without sacrificing focus. When a question is *directly* posed: 'do we live in a society of the spectacle?', a lukewarm answer can be given which proceeds uniformly. In this practical spirit which cannot bear an intensely differentiated position, Molière's *Tartuffe* is simply a critique of religious hypocrisy; Watteau's *A Mezzetino* merely a pastoral painting; Couperin's *Les Barricades mysterieuses* an ode to feminine chastity. An alternative reading need proceed no further than the following comment to gather together an answer far more plentiful for a line of inquiry: "The majority of the wines, almost all the spirits, and every one of the beers whose memory I have evoked here have today completely lost their tastes". This seemingly facile observation contains within it both the commencing question put forward at a higher level and an answer which warrants no arbitration. The loss of taste can say as much about the object as it can, as we've learned from Kant, about the capacities of a judging subject. The concordant abasement of each side, which can be described as *spectacular* in the most precise meaning of the word, suggests that even if beauty were to appear, standing right in front of our noses, it would remain unrecognizable. The cheapening of the world need not simply refer to the devalorization of labor-power, which nevertheless continues unabated. There remain miseries far more difficult to decipher than the origin of profit.

2.

The merit of a concept is not to be diminished simply for its historical baggage, but when it is no longer capable of critically elucidating the manifest ebb and flow of the social contradictions and antagonisms that make up the essential whole. The criteria for abandoning a category cannot rest on the difficulty of its empirical verification, its alleged commitment to mere epiphenomena, nor simply as a feckless metaphysics found guilty by

association. Whether considering aimless dissatisfaction, ambiguous malaise, unfurling neuroses, or deprivation of a full and vigorous experience of unhappiness—the unrelenting persistence of *unacknowledged* suffering in the present moment solicits a return to the question posed by Paul Mattick and the way it implicitly asks what it might mean to take something for an experience not experienced which, in so doing, excites within society morbid appetites. We thereby obtain from Mattick's question an answer thoroughly unintended and yet without wanton disregard for what it asks which, in a word, concerns a moniker that conjures a form of social commensuration under the spell of categorial appearance forms.

Part 1: Primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force

3.

The *perpetual* crisis of the economy and the universality of its theater, which began to palpably manifest itself in 2008, cannot be understood otherwise but from the unraveling of the postwar boom during the crisis of the early 1970s. Since that time, capitalism as a whole has been stumbling to combat the anguish of diminishing returns whose recourse of restructuring consisted in the expansion of finance capital and liquidity injection, asset-price adjustment, and increases in the rate of exploitation—all efforts to stabilize and defer its own inherent propensity to undermine the process of self-valorization. Additionally, a tepid economic improvement was bolstered and kept afloat by an unprecedented accumulation of state, corporate, and household debt. The ongoing crisis can only be comprehended as an effort to recalibrate the capital-labor relation in order to enable further cycles of accumulation amid a scenery of crippling debt. These tired mechanisms however, ranging from deficit spending, fiscal and monetary policy, and bond purchasing, to bankruptcy and austerity, continue to flounder against the prospects of restoring investment. While deflation might be momentarily avoided, steady growth remains an elusive spoil.

4.

Such conditions have produced a regime of labor-power devaluation that has intensified its duress within the present moment, which, alongside exacerbating fiscal and sovereign debt crises, continues to exert relentless immiseration. Here, the restructuring of the capital-labor relation as a reaction to the crisis of accumulation since the 1970s amounts to a crisis of the reproduction of the proletariat as a whole. It has been said that since this restructuring, the proletariat asserts only a *negative* relation to itself within the capital relation, that is, its class belonging appears as an external constraint to its material reproduction. As a result, in which the effective demand for labor-power diminishes, revolution no longer resounds as an affirmation of a unified proletariat or through the workers' identity mediated by, for example, parties, unions, parliaments, or vanguards—positions which, in the past, commanded a leverage against capital in a conquest for power. The content of revolution no longer appears as the triumph of the productive laborer as it might have during the first half of the 20th century. Contemporary class struggle does not yield an affirmation of the workers' identity in conflict with capital, but rather the inability of a unifying identity to emerge in the dynamics of these movements. The workers' movement no longer wields a universal consistency for class struggle. The old flair of proletarian representation and autonomy rings hollow. There is no universal stake in the wage demand. Fragmentation is the new class consistency.

5.

The era of the old workers' movement has ended, and class struggle is now characterized by the obstacle of class belonging itself—the compulsion of the exchange relation as a prerequisite for material reproduction has become a contradictory engagement in which contemporary global class struggle cannot posit the class's palliation through the wage demand. Through what has been described as a disconnection between the valorization of capital and the reproduction of the proletariat, struggles increasingly assume a *defensive* character, one in which unpaid wages, pensions, housing, healthcare and other public and private social benefits, acquire mounting precedence. The reproduction of the proletariat, whether employed or not, has emerged as an obstacle in the process of capital accumulation and it is as such that class struggle becomes primarily situated at the level of reproduction, whereby the proletariat confronts its material constitution as a class in conflict with capital.

The struggle of what is now the surplus proletariat is located both *beyond* the direct wage relation, and yet fundamentally *of* the wage relation, or more precisely, *of its contradiction*.

6.

A difficulty in stabilizing the present crisis, and in particular state deficits, is largely explicable in terms of the massive increase in government spending during the postwar period, itself an effort at avoiding previous economic depression. The *Trente Glorieuses* of postwar prosperity harmonized with a bounty of available labor through urbanization as well as substantial technological innovation that was developed during the war and awaiting consumer markets. This period procured an increase in productive investment for which consumer demand was activated. In contrast to contemporary developments, the postwar period produced—in exchange for the immense growth in productivity and the cheapening of commodities deriving from the massive devalorization of capital during the war—increased purchasing power and greater integration of the proletariat into the spheres of consumption. While this was reflected as a *relative* decrease in the value of labor-power to the total social value produced, it nonetheless occasioned an *absolute* increase in the real value of wages. This tendency was additionally accompanied by direct subsidies to the productive sphere as well as an increase in the indirect wage of the proletariat, which thereby obtained the luxuries of a slight increase in the price of its labor-power above the minimum necessary for its reproduction, alongside various supplements such as credit, welfare and retirement benefits.

7.

The postwar period of relative economic prosperity and abundance affirms the structural corollary between commodity production and consumption, a process already underway within the period from the late 19th century until the first World War for which the proletariat had gained greater access to the total commodity. The cultivation of the *consuming* aspect of the proletariat, rather than simply ignoring it, inaugurated a deeper integration of the proletariat into the accumulation process and reflects the real subsumption of labor under capital in accordance with the sphere of circulation. This process presupposes

capital advancing technological developments in electrical, transportation and communication systems, such as power plants, highways, automobiles, newspaper, film and radio. Thereafter, consumption can no longer be affirmed as anything other than the consumption of use-values.

8.

It is under such conditions that the time of leisure posited a historical precedence—a vast industrial sector of services and activities wrested from the ruling class and rendered into a paramount nutrient for the stupefaction of the proletariat. Leisure is a particular development of commodity society in which the compulsion to seek relaxation, provided by powerful amusement and entertainment industries, restores the labor-power spent within the process of production. The *democratization of leisure*, itself the result of the early 20th century cycles of capital accumulation, appropriated the stature of consumption patterns from the old ruling classes and inverted its conservatism into the demands of the perpetual innovation of commodity nuances. This change in consumption registers the production of new needs in and through the subsumption of use by exchange. The postwar conditions of capital accumulation accelerate both the general need for leisure, as well as the differentiated needs within that framework. The social realm of leisure, abolishing the scarcity of ‘free time’, is thereby the necessary result of abstract labor expended in the production process in its expansion of the total commodity. It is in no way a liberation from productive activity. If programmatism, as the autonomous affirmation of the class against capital, imagines an emancipation of labor, it does so through the *promise* of leisure. This point is made only to emphasize the intrinsic relation between production and consumption, each of which express differentiated moments in the totality of self-valorizing value. It is not so much that work justifies leisure but that leisure justifies work. The abolition of work is at the same time an abolition of leisure.

9.

The repression of the proletariat is always at once its infantilization.

10.

It is only at the level of appearances that leisure seems to displace work from the center of social arrangements. The implicitly compensatory character of leisure activity was rendered explicit as the proletariat, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, extended its power while necessarily extending the terrain of its struggle, thereby enabling new modes of conflict to arise alongside what might be hastily registered as directly ‘economic’ or ‘political’ ones. These conditions helped proliferate the various cultural-consumption criticisms that took aim at both the managerial sectors of society and at the impoverished content of what, at the time, was described as *everyday life*. By establishing the key category of ‘alienation’, critique, accompanied by the acclaim of existentialism, shifted towards the subjectivity of human experience and its corresponding forms of social fragmentation, often grounded in Marx’s early manuscripts, while invoking the general criticisms of modernity made by the early 20th century avant-garde.

11.

If the reader should permit, it is not out of line to draw on the meanderings of the *flâneur*, and with it the surveys of Baudelaire, to establish the contours of the realm of everyday life. Its sphere makes up the oscillating unity of production and consumption situated within the weight of the subjective experience of the daily and concrete activities of human beings in their routinized and preordained rhythms within modern urban life. It is the totality of experience constitutive of individuals socially mediated by the exchange relation. Work, leisure, private and public life, etc.—each comprise differentiated and fragmented moments within a unified whole of social existence. For its early proponents, the critique of everyday life established a field of inquiry for the measure of all things, the fulfillment or nonfulfillment of human relations, the use of lived time, of artistic experimentation, etc. The critique of everyday life implicitly articulated the intricate fabric of an alienated society.

12.

With the advent of the critique of everyday life, workers’ power is revealed as *purchasing*

power. Since the postwar period however, specifically with the economic contraction of the early 1970s and the increase in the rate of exploitation throughout the restructuring of the 1980s, the terrain of the critique of everyday life has rescinded with the deterioration of the prosperity of the previous period. Today, credit is seldom used to ornament everyday life with the glittering merchandise of economic abundance, but is instead employed merely to maintain base material reproduction. Households use stimulus to pay off debt. The question thereby emerges as to what legitimacy might the critique of everyday life—unmistakably related to the seemingly dated travails of 'alienation'—gain at a time when the crisis of the economy is calling attention to some of capitalism's more materially perilous operations—i.e. unemployment, austerity, and debt. When employment has become a privilege, the critique of everyday life appears negligible at best or insensitive at worst.

13.

The memory of the content of previous struggle must not be abandoned just because of an antiquated flavor. The limits of class struggle in the past are residually contained within the present moment. "The abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting". Communisation is bound up in the crisis of capital in its historic unfolding. "What is constant is not an invariable quantity of suffering, but its progress towards hell: that is the meaning of the thesis of the intensification of antagonisms."

14.

The question is how to correctly recognize the ways in which class struggle abolishes commodity relations, a process that implicitly contains multiple historical registers of which the proletariat, in its struggle with capital, and therewith with its own class belonging, has encountered varying dimensions of the wrong life lived. Just as "there is no linear development from present struggles to revolution", so also does communisation, in the present cycle of struggle, supersede the limits of all previous struggles. As a friend so adroitly put it, "every cycle of struggles is also part of the history of political economy, and from this history, proletarian dreams are born and killed. Our job, as theorists of communisation, is, one the hand, to write the history of these dreams, mapping them onto

the shifting grounds of political economy, and, on the other hand, to point out what the current conjuncture of capital and labor make possible." The content of past struggle subsists within the present. Communisation is the abolition of the proletariat in *all of its historical determinations*—the overcoming of everything prior to its appearance. "The role of communist theory […] devotes itself not to legislating what must be done but to making it possible to name that which has been done".

15.

The limits of the critique of everyday life within the postwar period did not arise because the ideas of the era were erroneous, but because of the social conditions and possibilities of its time. Class cannot appear as an external constraint if the luxuries of class belonging are reciprocated by capital. However, despite this, the different trajectories of critical theory, whether focusing on capital's increasing inability to satisfy human need, or an inquiry into what it might mean to identify with the dominant images of need—that is, with an emphasis on either material dearth or creative plenitude—must, against all odds, not abandon the latter at a time in which material reproduction is characterized by total ambiguity and uncertainty. In fact, it is precisely at times of economic crisis that the legitimacy of the value social form, with both its requited and unrequited promises, is at its most vulnerable. It is the task of critique to quell the budding connections of felt inequity with the false consciousness of a brighter tomorrow.

16.

The poor man isn't the one who cannot afford the price of the symphony ticket, it is the one who goes, but cannot hear the music.

17.

Insofar as struggles of the present are characterized by a relative deprivation or as a frustration of thwarted expectations, the critique of everyday life bears theoretical importance since that which occasions a rupture in expectations from the capital-labor

relation, while imaginable in terms of an *external* fulfillment, also contains the *internal* structure of the expectation itself. It is from this perspective that the needs cultivated by the real subsumption of labor under capital, along therefore with the usefulness of its products, can be reproached. What is incontestably demonstrated within this previous cycle of struggle, wherein discontent was excessively situated at the level of subjective experience, is that the uneasy and short breath of the proletariat carries with it a hidden animosity towards even its most intimate gratifications, that is, not merely against the form of wealth of bourgeois society, but also its most dazzling content. Revealed is exasperation with the cruel meaninglessness of a life whose continuance one is nevertheless striving, with all resources, to abet, support and secure. Despite their limited horizons, the *existential crises* of the postwar period are nevertheless integrated within the proletariat's historical unfolding. To ignore this accomplishment, and its limit, is to contort the proletariat into its early 20th century aspirations, wherein poverty is construed merely as a material affair or worse, as problem of *misrecognition*; here, the content of communism is the rational advancement of the forces of production towards an unparalleled mode of successfully satisfying the needs of a manifold of diversely commensurate individuals.

18.

The seemingly inevitable suffering that is patiently endured without discernable expression becomes intolerable once the idea of escape from it is suggested.

19.

With the quantitative expansion of productivity comes the qualitative expansion of poverty. Standards of living may be raised, not however without cutting off the possibility of fulfillment. The present *crisis of everyday life* takes its place within the manifest crisis of the economy, yet remains trivial to those who desperately cling to classical calculations of the eschatological dates of the next cyclical crises. This economism currently characterizes various ultra left tendencies, which, at their foundation, can only grasp struggles either within an existence whose supersession remains contingent on the worsening of economic conditions or political repression, or even more repulsive, as the reduction of struggles into

an idealist configuration of the capital-labor relation whose empirical data is sodomized by *a priori* necessity. The most advanced aspects of this milieu however demonstrate a cunning ability to vacillate between the necessarily complimentary opposites of fatalism and voluntarism, reflexes which clearly express an antagonistic social order and the intractability of its conflicts when conceived on its own terms. The point however is not to dogmatically emphasize one configuration of impoverishment over another, but rather to establish both to be individuated moments within *an impoverished whole*, that is, "a difference which is no difference". The question is not whether affluence is revocable or not. Discussions of abundance and scarcity are ultimately destined to subside in a resolution on equitable redistribution. The essence of the proletariat and its self-abolition takes aim not at the *quantity* of wealth within society, but rather against the *quality* and *measure* of that wealth, that is, against its very own objectified existence as a commodity whose increase or decrease in value merely gives this essence its expression. As such, it is perhaps the most revolutionary gesture of the proletariat to always *assume* capital capable of providing full employment, even if such a sentiment is utterly preposterous.

20.

The sterility of the *culture* of commodities is contained, somewhere, within contemporary struggles that appear as struggles over material reproduction—that is, an implicit recognition that the promises of any future Social Democracy can, at best, only offer a better standard of *nonliving*. Indeed, the fetish of capital is itself a process of individuating commodities whose autonomous movement pervades both the productive and consumptive spheres— themselves mediated opposites in a self-moving totality in which production in general remains a *sufficient* condition of spectacular participation, while conversely, spectacular participation a *necessary* condition for production in general.

21.

"Tracey Hammond, 50, a teaching assistant from Essex, who used the opportunity to visit the Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, east London. She said she had voted against the strike, but decided that when her school in Hornchurch, Essex was shut by the walkout she

“might as well make use of it”. She added: “I got the last Christmas pudding in Waitrose so it is worth having the day off”, and that, “shopping centres up and down the country were “absolutely heaving”, with up to seven per cent more visitors than usual.”

22.

The ‘loss’, ‘emptiness’, and ‘nothingness’ of capitalism cannot compete against its creative, diverse, and abundant stimulants, that is, in its capacity to produce unimaginable possibility and abundance. Police lines are broken more easily on Black Friday than they are under conditions of material survival. It is rather through capital’s concurrence of meaninglessness and meaningfulness that the revolution as communisation must proceed. “By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.” The travails of commodity society must not eclipse its rewards. As such, “whatever has a deep meaning, is worthless for that very reason.”

23.

Despite these considerations, the ceiling of the existential crises characterized by the postwar critique of everyday life is not to be minimized. The critique of alienation from the perspective of an omnipotent and muzzled subjectivity must itself be overcome. Here, the immediate givenness of inner experience is established as the fundamental point of departure, regarded as unconditioned and primary, and never inclined to inspect its own fully mediated preconditions. This subjectivity proceeds to a final *abstract* diagnosis with the occasional voluntaristic prescription. The best of them become alcoholics while the worst turn activist.

24.

Since at least the 1950s “everywhere the respect for alienation has been lost”, eclipsed by discursive seasons that liquidated subjectivity into either an epistemological error, a set of systematic operations, or clean palate with which to make one’s own. The critique of alienation itself must nevertheless be criticized, not however with an abandonment of its

fundamental essence—the commodity social form—but rather for idling in the sphere of subjective and phenomenological immediacy. This appearance of everyday life is at its core the arising and passing away that does not itself arise and pass away, but reproduces in itself the movement and actuality of the self-valorization of value. For this, everyday life is the actuality of objective reality constituted through subjective experience.

25.

Society should not be judged merely by what is says about itself; it cannot smell its own breath. When nothing can any longer be counted on to universally strike us as outrageous, horrific or even sublime, the sensibility of subjectivity stands at a precipice. It can be said that within the seemingly arbitrary subjective flights of consciousness, the essence of a society appears more thoroughly than when the essential questions are posed directly. Objective conditions are contained in every subtle subjective inflection. The point is neither to reduce social phenomena to the subjective experience of individuals, nor to abandon the realm of everyday life for a set of abstract logical categories. Instead, critical theory must establish the connection between the dynamics of capital accumulation and the corresponding modes of social life apprehended through the fetish forms—that is, through everyday life, whereby subjective orientation approximates objective class conditions. While it might be said that "the theory of fetish-forms, reification and alienation is not *sufficient* to develop a theory of revolution", such theories remain *necessary* for the theory revolution as communisation insofar as communisation consists in the activity for which individuals no longer find the possibility of defining *themselves* according to capitalist social roles. The "rules which direct the development of the capitalist mode of production have no finality *beyond that which they have for the agent interior to these rules*." The return to subjective experience—and therefore to its terrain of everyday life—is less an abandonment of the objective historical dynamics of the capital-labor relation than indicative of the real movement of capital to manage its recalcitrant opposite, i.e. the proletariat, in the absence of a unified workers' identity. While it might be said "the workers' movement privileged the class antagonism above all others", the present moment, in its intensified fragmentation of the proletarian condition, privileges antagonism at the level of subjective individuality, a conflict located within the historical development of the

social *principium individuationis*. It is precisely because of the individualization of the proletariat since the restructuring of the capital-labor relation beginning in the early 1970s that the question of modes of subjective identification reasserts itself as the mechanism of unifying difference for legitimizing the class relation as a whole. The appearance of class belonging as an external constraint does not, by itself, abolish the pathological compulsion to belong. “It is the hallmark of the age—the less you exist the more important it is to make a clear impression.” The violence of the ‘lone wolf’, whose politics remain predominantly idiosyncratic and blended with disjointed personal motives, is symptomatic of the disintegration of structures that historically obtained a shared social experience. Only the fraternity of the police is left. The longing for meaning sundered against the unrequited compulsion to belong transitions into self-sacrifice and the exaltation of martyrdom—to die with purpose in the religious cult of death. Its redeemable instantiation is Black Lives Matter which is only the rejection of belonging given concrete execution by the police. All in all, the preliminary mechanism of spectacular identification is the individuation of subjects adequate to the objective forces of a society which dominates them. For this, there is no greater expression of ideology than the separation of individuals and society, itself the point of departure for what is a nonpartisan naturalization of categories of ascriptive identity.

26.

It is not however that everyday life should merely resemble or reflect the conditions of accumulation, but that everyday life and the moments of accumulation intrinsically posit one another in a reciprocal relation; a tautological movement in which both perspectives are the subject and predicate of one another. Value is at once the essence and actuality of this whole which sunders itself into the substance of everyday life, a material which cannot help but refer back to the universal principle of accumulation.

27.

The critique of alienation as formulated in the past posits an unyielding rigidity to the hostility imposed on man by its own activity—devoid of its dynamics and historicity and

instead seeks refuge in mere formalism. To speak of alienation in its immediacy, or as a bare, natural, or minimum condition of commodity society, that is, without reference to *the whole of capital* as a self-moving contradiction, is to snivel in obscurities; an exercise of mere temperamental reflex. Abstract hatred limited to its resignation procures the most routine and anticipated expenditures. Where one ought to poison, its critics dismember.

28.

Above all else, we do without immediacy because of our hatred of opportunism.

29.

The critique of alienation has alienated itself, and by that distancing, the mediated whole of capitalist society is cast into the realm of thought. What is lost in this rendering is the essence of alienation as a perpetual, any yet varying, articulation—a ceaseless chatter whose repudiation can only commence once its grammar is understood. The renunciation of everyday life in this period is simply a waiver; it does not return to the critique of political economy but instead blissfully dissolves its universal character. Through it, subject and predicate are utterly indifferent, immediate beings which have nothing to do with one another and have no essential unity, so much so that each is the power of a separate independent condition. This existential loss stands at the edge of an innermost abyss, a bottomless depth in which all determinacy has vanished. From there it witnesses only the tantrums of a spoiled child, an opinion wholly devoid of its essence, a superficiality from which the movement of capital has fled. The critic of everyday life thereby renders indistinct the role of critical theory and base political propaganda.

30.

The moan of alienation has grown insipid in its trafficking and as such, can only express an alienation of *language*. This droning complaint has become trivial alongside the pervasion of syntax, grammar, and vocabulary by the forces of administration. As such, the compromised idiomatic refuge of ‘culture should not be a commodity!’ expresses the

delusion of commodity society's exteriority—a forsaking of immanent critique to the tenets of moralism.

31.

The vanity of the barren subjectivity is the self-centered self that knows, not only how to pass judgment on and gossip about everything, but how to give clever expression to the contradiction that is present in the solid elements of the actual world; the critic of everyday life is confident in how to express accurately the perversion of *everything*—it knows better than each what each is no matter what its particular nature or historical significance. An expert in the culture of commodities, the critic of everyday life has lost the ability to *comprehend* everyday life and as such, *fortifies* it. This scholar and his science are incorporated into the apparatus of society for which his achievements are a factor in the conservation and continual renewal of the existing state of affairs. Even advertising for a vacation in the Bahamas will implore you that 'boredom is counterrevolutionary'.

32.

The underlying pathology of the critic of everyday life is that he both begins and ends with the phenomenal world—a social critic who, himself an abstract form of an alienated existence, takes only himself in isolation as the criteria of that alienated existence. Leisure examination and the simple ability to notice something is nothing in-itself. The self-evident can never approach the heights of scorn demanded by the age.

33.

No critique has ever drowned so tragically within everyday life than that of the project of the Situationist International. The SI could only emerge at a moment during the postwar period when capital increasingly established a realm outside of labor proximate with the logic of the economy; in other words, with the proliferation of leisure in accordance with diminishing necessary labor time and rising wages. As such, it resonated with those on the margin of the productive sphere whose distance from the valorization process was

compensated by an augmented effective demand—that is, for the most part, with students. Because of these conditions, the SI could never detach itself from an invigorated avant-garde project, an infatuation relying on “a new revolutionary conception of culture” steeped in the inaccurately recognized permanence of increasing leisure time, thereby unequipped to survive past its own period. In the final analysis, the SI’s time is more important than the SI itself. The SI theorized from its social experience whereby culture was to be appropriated from the monopoly of the commodity, rather than subsumed within capital as a whole. Akin to their Romantic predecessors, the SI thought that the content of art could be realized within everyday life—to transcend a separation between *authentic* artistic moments and moments of utter banality. As such, they were against only “the *conventional* form of culture”, a combat which sought to alter “the *dual power* within culture” in a utopian and councilist favor; a movement from a *culture-in-itself* to a *culture-for-itself*—that is, as has been said, the last conflicted breath of programmatism.

34.

Despite their achievements, a paramount handicap of the SI was that the appearance of the opposition between capitalism and life remained the one exteriority beyond the critique of separations.

Part 2: Element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to pure reason

35.

The perspective of subjective experience goes into disrepute—a tradition already canonized with Bernstein and Kautsky—insofar as the objective forms of the capital-labor relation cannot be reduced to individual psychologies and deliberate decisions. The valorization process personifies class belonging adequate to its autonomous expansion. Those curious to know the truth about life in its immediacy are rightly implored to scrutinize its objectively estranged form which determines individual existence in its most intimate recesses. Considerations which start from the subject remain false to the extent that private life

expresses a socially necessary fracture of existence. As a result, subjective reflection has fallen into the realm of the sentimental, arrested in a condition of lamenting the course of the world. And rightly so, since “the individual has gained as much in richness, differentiation, and vigour as, on the other hand, the socialization of society has enfeebled and undermined him.” And yet, given the serene indifference with which exchange value liquidates the particular, the standpoint of subjective experience ostensibly offers critical theory a place to linger without bad conscience; to at once both dwell on particulars without succumbing to their absolute naturalization—that is, to their *ideologization*.

36.

The appearance of autonomous intellectual formations and the conditions by which they gain this independence are conceived jointly with a real historical movement under the name of ‘ideology.’ This separation can itself be defined as a social result of the division of labor, and as such, develops in accordance with the transformations of social fragmentation characteristic of class societies beginning from the division between intellectual and manual labor. The doctrine of ideology thereby belongs to the movement of human history, so that even if one supposes that the substance of the concept has not changed—which would be ridiculous—its scope is subject to developing social dynamics.

37.

Following the historical development of ideology, it is useful to note certain conceptual features of its prehistory. Occupying a distinct status within Enlightenment thought, the general conditions for a false content of consciousness had already been noted. However, these early formulations were grounded in an abstract subjectivism to which the responsibility of innate blindness fell entirely upon a subject’s cognitive fallibility, rather than grounded in objectively necessary and historical social formations. In this way, it can be said that the nature of the concept of ideology belongs exclusively to the bourgeois epoch, that is, an individual at the center of the world remains its interminable precondition. This invariance finds contemporary expression in the modern enterprise of opinion research, which holds a subjective opinion to be a virtuous datum.

38.

It could alternatively be said that ideology is as old as myth itself. Not, of course, as a concept—which emerges much later—but regarding its essence, that is, as a necessary component of a division of labor and in the distribution of surplus. Myth has been regarded as the first primitive effort at rationalization, establishing nature as an external object through superstition, magic, and in the exchange relation of sacrifice. Myth as ideology installs the objective forces of nature over and against the still nascent 'individual'. Here, mythic consciousness is also consciousness mystified. Over time, sacrifice progressively yields a precise and accurate calculation of quantities and proportions, a rationalized magnitude of exchange, thereby anticipating the use of money. As such, sacrifice can be described as the defining experience in which the first practical roots and ideological precursors of economic practice appear, one for which self-preservation and survival come to depend on pacts, contracts and more formalized modes of exchange with both mythical forces and other clans. Myth, it can be said, facilitating the development of the exchange relation, functions to conceal the cunning of exchange, that is, a pervasive form of social mediation increasingly dominated by the principle of equivalence and identity. The prehistory of ideology reveals its genesis within the social form of exchange, and therewith, in the development of a subjectivity that will come to fortify itself in private free labor. Its advancement supplants the objective forces of natural powers and instead positions society as an external force over and against the individual.

39.

Outside the haven of ideology, consciousness is immanent in history. Forms of thought develop under historically specific social forms. "Nothing could be wrapped in greater secrecy than the truth that the independence of the intellect is owed to its original social character." Sohn-Rethel, in bridging critical theory with the critique of political economy, made this point explicit by demonstrating the advent of the commodity to unknowingly carry with it a particular epistemological structure adequate to the private individuals of the exchange relation. The question of ideology thereby resides within the notion that socially

necessary forms of thinking must subsist in conformity with the predominant form of social synthesis. Ideology must emit from the fetish character of the forms of value to the extent that the economic laws governing individuals' lives are so overwhelming that they necessarily take on the appearance of natural forces. The ideological underpinning of social forms is identified through the uninterrupted repetition of the projection of their image onto the universe at large. This reification is a historical process exceeding the direct realms of production and exchange where the fetish character of the value social form finds both substance and validation. Here, socially necessary semblance is unconsciously maintained at the level of the social determination of form. One cannot determine the falsity of a worldview outside of the concrete overcoming of the conditions that make that worldview necessary.

40.

It has been said that for Marx ideology refers to the role of ideas within class struggle, not as a category of *conceptual* truth, but as an element in the balance of class forces for which *social-historical* truth is concealed. While it is indeed correct to conceive of ideology as illusion insofar as the structural antagonisms of a social formation are obscured, the identity between social forms and forms of cognition suggests that the derangement characteristic of commodity relations subsists at the level of conceptual truth and therefore has a role to play within the reproduction of the class relation. The instinct to theoretically master concepts is an instinct of class belonging.

41.

Like all mediation, the distance constitutive of epistemic principles and their standards of reflection undergoes profound historical transformation. The faculty of cognition formally emulates the structure of the exchange relation as an abstract commensuration of the non-identical. The indifference of ideology is a movement by which the subjective determination of a concept is unforgivingly imposed upon the non-identical to constitute a relation of identity. As the necessary condition for the possibility of experience, money remains ideology's unchallenged exemplar. It is thereby the *form* of ideology, rather than any

particular *content*, that decrees its substance. No specific belief system can, by itself, unravel the structure of ideology. The manifest content of a belief matters little against the form with which it nervously sits beside others. The internal coherency between competing belief systems rests at the level of the form. The actualized universality of ideology is the equivalence between differing contents of knowledge. Its preliminary logic is one of accentuating and embellishing resemblances while disavowing and effacing differences. Meaning always presupposes equivalence.

42.

The majestic process of abstraction into the identification and commensuration between subject and object is *spectacular* in nature. The equivalence postulate holding the unity together under a reign of appearance forms yields only quantitative differences within a qualitative identity. As a result, the relation between individuals is expressed as a one-way causal sequence of two otherwise unchangeable objects and dominated by a principle for which isolated entities are uninterruptedly reconciled. Contradiction has now only the sense of *wanting to be different*.

43.

Since spectacular logic culminates in a pluralism while celebrating the universality of equality, its cardinal medium is public opinion—the *thought* of the general equivalent for which one holistic worldview is worth just as much as another. Postmodernism, which doesn't so much problematize the concepts of modernity as it obscures them, has its determinations—the torturously prolonged lingering of revolutionary defeat. A path so darkened it appears as an open field. The cosmologically innumerable massacres, and alternatively possible *victories* of the Paris Commune could only be written within the enclosing walls of Blanqui's prison cell. The privileged considerations of Tocqueville hold fast: upon the great withering of thought has ascended public opinion, a frail and infantile state with which we propound the most unaccompanied convictions. The empty content of public opinion—whose boisterous energy can be seen in contemporary populism regardless of its stripe—is neither a result of a reflective and sober contemplation of reality nor an

unrestrained outward roar of inner feeling. “History and its contents become the occasion for world historical chatter; its banner is a relativism which takes nothing seriously and which no longer is taken seriously.” Ideas are to be distinguished only by their height, breadth and volume, by the quantities of their dimensions, by their numeral relations. For this, the structure of contemporary populism is nonpartisan in nature, exemplifying “the yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming both yes and no, the no becoming both no and yes, the contraries balance, neutralize, paralyze each other.”

44.

“What do Jean-Paul Sartre, Fredric Jameson and Etienne Balibar have in common? They’re all 60% off in this special flash-sale for our email subscribers, with free shipping worldwide (and bundled ebooks where available)!”

45.

In a 2009 study published in *Science*, the psychologists John Antonakis and Olaf Dalgas suggested that, when we judge a candidate as more or less competent, we do it in the same way that children do. They first asked a group of adults to rate pairs of faces, taken from the 2002 French parliamentary elections, based on how capable they seemed. When they compared the ratings to actual election results, the correspondence was seventy-two per cent. The ratings even predicted the margin of victory; the more competently-rated the face, the higher the margin. The researchers then had a group of children play a computer game, simulating a boat trip from Troy to Ithaca, in which they had to choose a captain for the voyage; their options consisted of the same 2002 election candidates. The two sets of responses were indistinguishable from each other: seventy-one per cent of the time, the children picked the election winner to pilot the boat.

46.

Only the most short-sighted can consider factional disputes and a strict differentiation between shades of opinion opportune or significant.

47.

The natural tendency of spectacular mediation is to flex its muscles taxonomically, that is, to interpret phenomena by assigning firmly delineated categories. Its ideology is the regimentation of experience manifesting itself in conceptual thought. Its point of departure is the reflection of substantial things as independent from consciousness, and in so doing, annuls the question of things-in-themselves. As such, private life is both its result and presupposition. This limitation naturalizes the schism between subject and object as a perpetual disparity connected through a relation of causal instrumentality directly inherited from the natural sciences. It is the successful effort of a conscious subject to reflect upon its object in utter isolation. The objectivity of the world is reduced to an aggregate of atomistic facticity. However, this distortion of the world is no mere masquerade: "[t]he essence of the world coincides with the statistical law by which its surface is classified" so that the truth of reality conforms to its positivist contortion.

48.

Unlike classical or premodern ideology, spectacular ideology evades the exposure of an anchored reality by accommodating the most varied material in accordance with the changing configurations of the totality of the capital-labor relation. It respects a seemingly endless diversity of phenomena while supplying an inner principle of organization. It is both persuasive and gullible. Any momentary glance at global supply chains will demonstrate the importance of reconciling diversity within a form-determined structure rather than simply as an element to be extinguished. Much as exchange value requires use-value to be value's concrete form of appearance, so must spectacular ideology collapse differences into one another while never completely annihilating qualitative distinction. For this and within its mechanism of commensurability, it is *the accommodation between a defense and an attack* on given social conditions. There can, of course, exist competing belief systems, evaluations, judgments, motivations, expectations and *Weltanschauungen* inasmuch as there can exist individuated currencies. Nevertheless, all must be communicably interchangeable under an abstract continuum of *tolerance*. Reverting to the drachma or deutsche mark will

not collapse international trade.

49.

The distance guaranteed by the objective movement of spectacular ideology extends itself through the totality of capitalist mode of production. Through it, politics is paired to economy, labor to capital, art to commerce, individual to society, subject to object, theory to practice, thought to existence, *ad nauseum*. Once the faculty of reflective differentiation and determination has been obliterated, particulars, in their autonomous isolation, are asserted as the fragmented substitutes of truth. It might be provocatively said that this development corroborates, on some level, the historical obsolescence of workers' autonomy insofar as the unity of contemporary social movements proceeds through "the construction of differences whose interrelation is conducive to the desired result." Frameworks that posit the separation of 'economics', 'politics', 'culture' and 'ideology' already unknowingly weave a spectacular fabric.

50.

While it may appear as if the plane of ideology is confined to an issue of epistemology—i.e. people not *knowing* what they do—any asphyxiated knowing is an objective condition of social *being* and is not reducible to an individual's subjective mode of knowledge acquisition. Said another way, *how* and *what* one knows is not independent of *what* one is *when knowing*. The form of ideology is the result of activity and inscribed within social relations of production. "In addition to being the means of subsistence, the material process of production finally unveils itself as that which it always was, from its origins in the exchange-relationship as the false consciousness which the two contracting parties have of each other: ideology. Inversely, however, consciousness becomes at the same time increasingly a mere transitional moment in the functioning of the whole. Today, ideology means society as appearance. Although mediated by the totality behind which stands the rule of partiality, ideology is not simply reducible to a partial interest. It is, as it were, equally near the centre in all its pieces." Never merely illusory, the universal ideas embedded within *real* abstractions articulate a *real* semblance of concrete reality. It would

thus be ideological itself to posit the universal as *solely* a phenomenon of consciousness. Conversely, it is definitively ideological to assume matter ontologically prior to thought. The zenith of vulgar materialism is phrenology. Likewise, the superiority of thought over concrete reality risks similar absurdity in the omnipotence of the transcendental ego and its categories of the understanding. Ideology is the fortification and permanence of the chasm opened up by the base-superstructure model. It is the preservation and affirmation of materialism and idealism in a perpetual stalemate. Here, materialism is degraded unto the positivism of the natural sciences, ultimately idealizing matter wherein 'sensible supersensible' things become the masters of social life. Idealism supplements this petrification as real abstractions come to instantiate concrete reality. Such is the manner in which ideology facilitates and legitimizes the valorization process, both by idealizing matter and materializing abstractions, never exposing its mutually constitutive dialectic.

51.

Ideology is the falsified social reality constitutive to its social configuration, the unconscious society made manifest. As a socially-necessary semblance, it consists in the objective illusion which legitimates the social structure of class relations. The relation of class belonging is not simply imposed from above, but is saturated by an internalized legitimation which the structure of class relations verifies. Here, ideology is the expression of class belonging unbeknownst to itself, the basis of thought of class society and never reducible to a subjective error, an individual cognitive blunder, or ignorance—or able to be exorcised from the private individual—it is the unconscious consciousness of a self-contradictory totality. Nor is it confined to class partisanship, wherein one where one group imposes its interests and dogmas upon another. Ideology is not class prejudice, but tendencies on the formation of judgments, ones that are rooted in class belonging. These dispositions displace living conceptual distinctions with atrophied oppositions for which the dogmatic assumption that rational formalistic modes of cognition are the only possible ways of apprehending reality. Such modes of grasping the world are destined to replicate the immediacy of the given.

52.

The veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society has become dispensable to the bourgeoisie itself.

53.

Ideology is never simply illusory but carries through ‘real deforming acts’. Ideology does not pacify; it *galvanizes*. The thought of this society is less the mere imprint of existence than that which penetrates existence. However, the truism that ideology influences concrete reality is not sufficient. If there is an identity between thought and existence, it is not one of synchronicity, but of contradiction. This contradiction, between the objective movement of thought and its realization, cannot adequately be dealt with by traditional thinking and should be qualified as a contradiction within the thing itself and not merely as a deficiency of method. For this, thought and existence do not ‘correspond’ to one other through some ‘affinity’. Nor do they ‘reflect’ each other, ‘run parallel’ to each other, or ‘coincide’ with one another. Ideology is therefore no longer a veil, but the menacing sneer of the world itself. One cannot see the world *not* as it really is. Nobody believes anybody, and yet everyone is in the know. The ‘seeming’ of appearance is internal to the essence, not a distortion of the essence.

54.

The unifying principle of the world is its division, one for which the universal and particular are affirmed in an irreconcilable and unimpaired clarity. The parodic end of the division of labor can suddenly appear and in the next moment return to previous arrangements at the close of a lunch break. The essence of such artificial relation is false, while its spectacular appearance is true. Such is the basis of ideology in the present moment for which the lie has long since lost its honest function of misrepresenting reality. Here, “representations are not a more or less well-fitting double for reality but are active instances of this reality which assure its reproduction *and permits its transformation*.” Ideology does not conceal ‘real life’, nor supplant any ‘authenticity’. The haze that necessarily arbitrates between society and an understanding into its nature, precisely because of this necessity, expresses the nature

itself. “There is a surface of capitalist society, but it is a surface without depth.”

55.

“Chevron delivered gift certificates for a large pizza and a two-liter bottle of soda to 100 households in Bobtown, Pennsylvania, following an explosion and five-day-long fire at a fracking well in neighboring Dunkard Township. ‘We are committed to taking action,’ said a letter accompanying the certificates.”

56.

The false is the spectacular medium for the reflection of truth. Ideology is the consciousness adequate to the truth of a reality in its utter falseness. It is the interlacing of the truth and the false, thereby standing in great contrast to both the untainted truth and the pure lie. Within its world, the boundaries between the true and the false are equally liquidated. Ideology is joyously fulfilling within its very dynamic, through which stimulation is remunerated through the perennial stream of commodity nuances. To assert that all entertainment is ideology is to say nothing of ideology. It is rather the case that *all ideology is entertaining*, that is, occupying a premium seat in the theater of commodity society to witness, from a contemplative distance, the legitimately captivating drama between human beings and their activity. Within commodity society, ideology is persuasion without effort: it is *a priori* persuasion. Communism cannot, therefore, be a liberation of truth against the false, but rather the dissolution of their mutually constitutive relation. Individuals, with the adamant belief in a lie that is of their creation produced in the realm of production and realized in the sphere of exchange, comes to associate their own interests with that of the inverted world. This is *the autonomy of the lie*, an independence that ideology, in its previous formulations, could never achieve so long as it could be revoked by the concrete conditions of social reality.

57.

Prior to the advent of the real subsumption of labor under capital, the structure of ideology

does however manifest itself as one set of particular beliefs against another. Nowhere is this best epitomized than during the revolutions of the late 18th century, for example, wherein ideals and principles effectively rode in on horseback. All this is over. The end of programmatism, it might be said, equally applies to ideology, which no longer bears any hint of a political vision. The most important question evoked by the transformation of a statue of Lenin into Darth Vader in Odessa is how strong the installed Wi-Fi signal is which emits from his helmet. Starting in the early 20th century cycles of accumulation, "ideological pretention acquires a sort of flat positivistic exactitude: it is no longer a historical choice but a fact." *Particular* ideologies recede into moments of a *universal* ideology. No longer do ideologies consist in a misshapen reflection on the essence and truth of reality. While the middle ages may not have been able to live without Catholicism, and the ancient world without politics, our is an epoch fully capable of generating atheistic barbarians so long as there is a market for them. Commercials during a Super Bowl are not venerated for the *particular* commodities they advertise, but through a *universal* devotion to the promises of advertised fulfillment. The history of particular ideologies competing for supremacy is over. The disappearance of ideologies is at the same time the omnipotence of ideology. There is no ideology and yet it is all there is. Its prerogative, repeated over and over again, has been to find a fantasy, or an army, to link confusion with management.

58.

"No branding, no washes, no embroidery, no ad campaigns and no celebrities. The Unbranded Brand is a crazy new concept in the world of premium apparel. While other companies compete based on image, expensive ad campaigns and celebrity endorsements, we have decided to do the opposite. Have you ever wondered why jeans cost what they do? Why do some "premium" jeans sell for $250 while others sell for $80? We think overpriced, over-marketed jeans are silly. That's why we've stripped our jeans down to the core essentials: a great fit, solid construction and top quality selvedge denim. By eliminating all the unnecessary, we're able to sell a better product at a better price. Simple as that."

59.

The common denominator of all ideology is *naturalization*, even the naturalization of relativism or innovation. Within this tendency is located the fact that “everywhere we look, nature is a mess, both materially and conceptually.” Taking a sober cue from the Romantics, let us first admit that there is something about being—definitively removed from nature—that neglects as of late the humility of shame. The bountiful prospect of standing upright dissolves any nostalgia of noble savagery and catapults us beyond the sensation of falling from grace. Of course, none could have predicted the reward for renouncing instinct to be chronically poor posture. In any regard, nature is compelled to hold her breath for the sake of the social business of man. The heteronomy of nature, crowded out of human consideration by philosophical, aesthetic and religious rumination, is scientifically reestablished on specialized fields by the development of the natural sciences. In this moment, nature appears as a force transcending all collusion with man, a force totally separated from the human sphere. Where they do convene, often anthropocentrically, both are equally hollowed out from any qualitative mutual determination and willingly carry the conservative positivism of yesteryear. Nature emerges through the social form as pure object world, it appears as *landscape*. The semblance of the natural is itself only the projected social experience assuming the form of a blind and necessary repetition, the objectivity of historic life become natural history. Its elemental corollary is the appearance of use-value in and through exchange-value, the affirmation of *erste Natur*, material in substance, under the purely social form of *zweite Natur.* A specious appearance is always the result of a retroactive process of naturalization wherein labor can only ever be a matter of physiology. Abstractions call the concrete into existence, and just as easily, dissolve matter as if by rust and moths.

60.

The curse of being useful is the reconciliation made with the tyranny of necessity which “grants its slaves three kinds of freedom: opinion free from intellect, entertainment free from art, and orgies free from love.” Necessity made into a virtue was always the justification for economy. The constitution of use and need through the autonomous determinations of a social form and in their emphatically lauded legitimation for the reigning domination of the commodity is what, for Debord at least, the category of the

spectacle specifically signified, the needs of bourgeois society become *zweite Natur* regardless of their successful gratification. Its solicitation can rest comfortably against ample empirical evidence to the contrary so long as it speaks to the possibility of satisfying a social need. Just as compulsive neuroses are thoroughly rationalized so must the greatest suffering evoke satisfaction.

61.

Spectacular ideology affirms the validity of the principle of harmony within an antagonistic society. Above all else, it is *justification* insofar as it presupposes a social condition at odds with itself requiring a defense. For this, it is the answer to social fragmentation—*the agreement to disagree*. Its ideology is located at the level of the social whole, never this or that province or politic, but the unspoken cohesion amid a wreckage of segments. Ideology does not express the particular class positions of those who hold them. Obama is not wrong when he consoles us by saying that Trump is 'non-ideological.' No longer does the ruling class synecdochically project its own interests as the interests of the whole of society. In the past, ideology made its appearance when a particular cautiously stood in for a universal, when the interests of one wielded the rubric of the many. Such generalizations led to fantastical dreams. This logic has however now led to an open field for which anything can be transformed into everything. For this, ideology always believes ideology to be elsewhere. "It can keep the original name for something secretly changed (beer, beef or philosophers). And it can just as easily change the name when the thing itself has been secretly maintained." As an apologia for difference, it thereby has as its model the commensurability of the exchange relation. Any clash of ideologies more closely resembles the clash between competing capitals. As a unity-in-difference, ideology has as its goal the reconciliation of class segments, a force of counterrevolution within the dynamics of struggle mounting intensity since the restructuring of the capital-labor relation, and therefore with the atomization of the proletariat. "That where it succeeds in seeing *differences*, it does not see *unity*, and that where it sees *unity*, it does not see *differences*. If it propounds *differentiated determinants*, they at once become fossilised in its hands, and it can see only the most reprehensible sophistry when these wooden concepts are knocked together so that they take fire."

62.

The ethos of the current conjuncture adheres to the adage that a bad peace is better than a good quarrel.

63.

Dear E-J

Thanks for responding to the call and sending your piece. It is, alas, too far from the political brief at the basis of Field Notes. But I was glad to read something by you.

Two comments: First, it's nice to encounter the spirit of Adorno in your excellent writing. As an essay, the piece is terrific.

Second, I think you are on the wrong track here, despite my enjoyment of your attempt to rejuvenate the fetishism of the art object. I don't even know what it would mean for an artwork to have its own soul, since I think that even a natural phenomenon—a beautiful rock or a cute puppy--acquires meaning only as included in some human practice. Hence I stress (in my own thinking) the multiplicity of meanings that works can have, which are brought out by different modes of exhibition--including the single-work show. Right now, for instance, Katy is experimenting with the difference made to the content of a Pollock or Newman when shown together with an Ernest Mancoba or Gutai work. I'm really against closed borders, for things as well as for people.

Best, Paul

64.

The abolition of the proletariat had no worse enemy than the persistent illusions concerning itself. The struggle for recognition, in eclipsing class struggle, marches under the banner of

a pluralist tolerance which defensively assumes the appearance of a *citizenry* against its own proletarianization. In its limitless and implacable demands, its proponent sticks out its chest, identifying itself with a power it does not itself possess. Like the classical petty-bourgeois before it, its symptomatic middle-strata pose weakness as strength, betraying the thought of the bourgeoisie to ideology, even as this class was thundering against tyranny. Its clamor is always a clamor of unfair and unjust distribution whose political formalization solicits the logic of a 'corrupted' part against the purity of a whole that always necessitates the state.

65.

"We should be alarmed that corporate wrongdoing has come to be seen as such a routine occurrence. Capitalism cannot function without trust."

66.

As a mode of pathological identification and adaptation, ideology pivots between *individual* interests and *class* interests. Through the former, the objectivity of the world itself is subject to a devastating skepticism and resolves into relativism and perspectival narrative. The latter, for which the era of programmatism as the affirmation of class identity is characteristic, is increasingly discredited against the intensified segmentation of the proletariat and the absence of a unified class consistency to yield greater compensation from capital. *The class unity of programmatism is eclipsed by the unity of ideology.*

67.

"If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere."

68.

The resurgence of protectionism and the consolidation of national identities are only the most recent phenomena with which to gauge the spectacular imperative to reconcile particulars. From the postwar period until the crisis of the early 1970s, the international

division of labor pivoted upon relations between nation states in which political and economic variations were accommodated through a global monetary system, international capital controls and a system of fixed but adjustable exchange rates. Since the restructuring of the 1970s, there accelerates a global integration of capital, exemplified through financialization and an international restructuring of the capital-labor relation. After the unwavering crisis of 2008 however, particulars—whether individual capitals, national economies or segmented proletarians—appear to come apart at the seams without abolishing their unity. The frenzy of international finance capital has become strictly an issue of national sovereignty exemplified through increasing deficit spending, leveraged investment and monetary financing by central banks.

69.

The fortification of immiseration through national identity and borders is a response elicited at the level of individuality. The crisis of the nation is at once the crisis of an exaggerated subjectivity turning further inward, that is, nativist. The nonpartisan appeal to a restoration to sovereignty against supranational institutions and parliamentary unaccountability finds acute expression in trying to regulate the content of one's Twitter feed. The turbulence of individual national economies is the transmuted projection of an unhinged individual clamoring to gain a foothold amid "the ceaseless circularity of information, always returning to the same short list of trivialities, passionately proclaimed as major discoveries." This is what it means to be a *citizen* today. What the poise of the Leave campaign in the UK and the pageant of Trump's ascendency in the US reveal—aside from the weak egos that make up the respective constituencies with idealizations on the strength of an individuality that never was—is a consolidation of left and right into a unity of 'post-truth'. The 'fake news' or 'disinformation' each side claims to pervade the other "now spreads *in a world where there is no room for verificatio*n. […] There must be disinformation, and it must be something fluid and potentially ubiquitous." Inherent in all existing information, falsehood, when *named*, does not exist. Where it exists, it is not named.

70.

The state is only the vicarious proxy for the circulation of falsehood at the center of the citizenry. The content of their algorithmic platforms is measured only through the metrics of widespread publicity and popularity, that is, through the framework of *illiteracy*. Any appeal to 'authentic' journalism installs a dichotomous fray between impervious facticity and only the most superficial deceit. The truth of any forgery resides in a world which requires perversion for its reproduction.

71.

Ideology is the coherence through which the world shifts into the disarray of protectionist madness. Consumption based on low-interest rates, rising house prices and central bank and government credit cannot generate an eventual boom in investment and output. This crisis of accumulation is at once a crisis of ideology, whereby the suspension of growth induces a possible decomposition of all the eternal metaphysics surrounding a society dominated by commodity production. The criteria of needs transforms in agreement with the means to procure them. With its offended standards, moral education itself must be recommenced before mediocrity unearths itself against distaste. At this moment, "the limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations […] Appetites, not being controlled by a public opinion, become disoriented, no longer recognize the limits proper to them." Moral discipline is always one aspect of social discipline; the former is always slackened when the latter weakens. Today, the objective disintegration of society is reflected in the total incoherence and irreconcilability of opinions joined under a singular ideology of spectacular commensuration. The fall of empires has always entailed the collapse of logical predicates, conjunctions, declensions, and other rationalities. Crisis is more consequential as a malaise. The practice of sabotage cannot be relinquished to the realm of production at a moment when increasing portions of society *do not work*.

72.

There are many things with which the world wishes to be deceived; and that it more easily

excuses a person in acting than in talking contrary to the decorum of his profession and character. Prior to war, only maniacs have disturbing things to say.

Part 3: The play of chance and probability, within which the creative spirit is free to roam

73.

The quality of *taste*—as both a faculty of the subject and the corresponding feature of the object—remains the unparalleled register of social history.

74.

In approaching their happiness, recall them as they are at their worst since it is the possessors of the most comfort that will suffer most of all.

75.

Freud wrote that what we *call* happiness in the strictest sense comes from the satisfaction of needs. However, the simple reproduction of life is not the meaning of life. Revolution as the celebrated satisfaction of 'real' wants and needs to ensure minimal biological survival is only another way of describing the miscarriage of human emancipation. To the extent that it is capable of being discussed in the present, the content of communism cannot simply consist in the advancing logic of self-preservation, or to mere material sustenance or survival. Communisation is not merely the expropriation of material existence for the satisfaction of needs. The closer the guaranteed sphere of immediate, physical existence is approached, that is, as the victory of a more rational mode production, the further communism recedes into the distance. Today's "infatuation with the narrowest forms of practical activity" by those "who cannot pronounce the word "theoretician" without a sneer" unrelentingly adhere to the dominant images of social need. "Thus madness reappears in the very posture which pretends to fight it. Conversely, the critique which goes beyond the spectacle must know how to wait."

76.

Humanity is pushed closer and closer to beast insofar as it produces under the pressure of immediate need. Under the tutelage of blind necessity, “to be confined to mere physical needs as such and their direct satisfaction would simply be the condition in which the mental is plunged in the natural and so would be one of savagery and unfreedom, while freedom itself is to be found only in the reflection of mind into itself, in mind’s distinction from nature, and in the reflex of mind in nature.” One may speculate, without great conviction, that the abstract model of need satiation within communism more closely resembles the enjoyment obtained in placing oneself voluntarily into frigid discomfort on a cold winter night by withdrawing a bare leg from underneath the quilt and then quickly drawing it back again into a permanent grandeur of luxury.

77.

Since man does not live by bread alone, but also by catch phrases, “at least the best reasons for civil war will not be in short supply.”

78.

The recognition of freedom within necessity is the truth of *culture*. Culture is the growing alienation between subject and object, between man and nature; it is freedom in the shape of necessity, security in the shape of contingency, relations in the shape of things. Its freedom is paid for by its marginalization. An industrial society can only procure an industrial culture. Culture is the particulars of consumption totaled. The little black box of consumer attention is the limitation of the market’s rational growth. Populations of consumption have always been at the whim of complex movements of materials whereby the perceptive ability of individual intelligence is incapable of tallying, but which, nevertheless, striates their anatomy. At this juncture, culture is mined through human sorting paired with computational algorithms, and fed back to an on-demand user what she already knows she wants, but doesn’t know the name for. A practical example of where this takes place is with

Amazon Books. The individual arrives on the website to use the service, initiating the selection of a book, and a program automatically runs the collected data of every individual that has selected this same book, rendering a predictability that will engender correct consumptive practice, and thus individuating a consumer. She has been described perfectly accurately before herself. And now she is in the sad position of having to purchase Hannah Arendt.

79.

Greetings Paul

Thanks for the feedback and the kind words. I figured it was a long shot. I wanted nevertheless to respond to your what I take to be very important second comment.

I should firstly clarify that I think the stakes of what you refer to as rejuvenating the fetishism of the art object exceed the work of art. As a social critique, it fundamentally concerns our reified relation to the objective world. A tenet of reification is the antinomy of subject and object and the failure of mediation. We either hold fast to objective forces regarded as immutable and timeless or project the centrality of our subjectivity onto all that surrounds us. If we translate this historically specific social ontology into the realm industrial culture, we find that in many ways the work of art itself becomes obstructed or inaccessible. We flip through an exhibit like we do all others: gleeful at the choice of variety and satisfyingly ‘cultured’ in being able to recall a piece with the ever-empty ‘interesting’.

I emphatically concur that our apprehension or engagement with the objectivity of the world makes little sense without the meaning of its being embedded in social practice. However, I also fear that the veneration of ‘multiple meanings’ is often a reflex of liberal pluralism. Everyone of course, we incessantly hear, has a right to their own opinion. But I think that logic ultimately expresses the ideology of accommodation which usually wants to avoid the conflict and antagonism just below the surface. This is not to suggest your comments embody such an itinerary. I only aim to unpack my reservations.

I should also say that I don't think that the recourse of my concerns means that the meaning of a work ought to be fixed and without varying significance. If anything, the transient history of society and human practice contains the ever changing criteria on the meaning of a work. For example, there is something today about Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* that exudes a certain absurd irony in its distinctive movements at a time when the weather no longer exhibits consistently rhythmic or cyclical patterns. It can be summer in the morning and winter in the evening. Seasons simply do not exist anymore, at least not in the way they have in the past. This has great significance for the meaning of the piece and demonstrates the historical nature of a work's meaning.

Within an exhibit, yes it is true that the meaning of an individual work is given a different significance than if it were arranged otherwise. This is a premise to my bombastic little tirade. However, I think it is worth asking in what ways the immanent components of a work interact with its surroundings. What is the result? Nuanced meaning, perhaps. An eclipse of the work's singularity and particulars by skillful curatorial management is also possible. All in all, while some of my formulations may effectively appear idealist or even mystical (e.g. the 'soul' of the work), I contend that while situated in an epoch without the strength to patiently pause in the face of a coherent thought, hesitating to 'see it all in one day' might oddly be one of the more utopian gestures.

Anyway, many thanks for allowing me the occasion to ramble! Let's continue it in Amsterdam!

Gratefully,
Eric-John

PS. I know it has been some time but related to these issues is the progress of *Cured Quail*. I hope to send you a full update in the coming days.

80.

Culture is the auxiliary means by which commodity society interprets itself as *not being of*

commodity society, that is, the propulsion of knowledge and representations of lived experience into an autonomous movement, whose economy index, while providing the capacity for individuation (a necessary component of exchange), nevertheless bans all other ontologies. Its generalized independent existence, which both reflects and prefigures the possibilities for organizing life through its complex of knowledge, aesthetics, sentiments and customs, has its roots in the material and mental division of labor, to which a class of priests, predecessors of the artist, first emerges. Within culture, thought comes to *actually* flatter itself that it is something other than the consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real.

81.

The concept of culture itself emerges, in its most secularized form, in the midst of German Grecophelia [*Grieschensehnsucht*], a romantic longing for a past which never was, one characterized by a completeness in which man developed to his fullest potential. This of course can only be the lamentation of a fragmented modern man whose dreams become projected onto a holistic antiquity, and then regurgitated back as *Bildung*.

82.

The slogans of ethics, culture, and inwardness are merely the cloaks for weak muscles. This kind of talk is the madness of the musician “who heaped up and mixed together thirty arias, Italian, French, tragic, comic, of every sort; now with a deep base he descended into hell, then, contracting his throat, he rent the vaults of heaven with a falsetto tone, frantic and soothed, imperious and mocking, by turns.”

83.

Anyone who is at all familiar with the social milieu of those with special status in cultural affairs is well aware of how they all despise each other and are bored by each other. This fact is not hidden, they are all quite aware of it; it is even the first thing they talk about at gatherings. Occasionally flattering one another into compliance, each recognizes in the other

her insignificance and conditioning—the resignation she has had to accept to participate in this separate milieu and its established aims. By brandishing emblems of submission and individualized conceit, the style of an opinion carries the libidinous significance of registering correct partners on one's dance card. Personal or ideological disagreements remain secondary in comparison with what they have in common: a hallway of mirrors and duplicate balls of yarn, "the comedy played by the famous".

84.

The subject of modern self-appreciation arrives at the ball alone and meets a Belle Dame. Her name is aesthetic discourse. Sneered at by the aristocrats and esteemed by the bourgeoisie, the two find it mutually beneficial to vanquish the minuet and dance a waltz. As they glide around the parquet in triple time the light on the world dims, and stateliness relinquishes decorum for the delirium of sensual experience. Modern aesthetic discourse, originating from the conceptually determinate aesthetic experience of the ancients' apprehension of the beautiful as a harmonious balance of components and the classical rationalist discernment of the truth mediated by the sensible, dawns a disinterested lagniappe: a slumgullion of indeterminate reasoning.

85.

The mode of denial, like all rejection, is seldom taken with grace. Its tactful veneer is usually moments away from a desperate dissolution, precariously poised along a sea of panic. The history of modern art has fortified the loss of significance by expressing truth of feeling from wildlife preserves. Its sophistry can be extracted from its oscillation between claims of sensual transcendence and complaints of insufficient payment. "The victories of art are bought with the loss of character." Within modern art, the self-destruction of a common set of signs is recomposed under the regime of appearances, whose first critical phase negatively expresses a formal decomposition of traditional art, and is subsequently characterized by empty repetition. Mallarmé's parsimonious toss off of inkless retainers devalues the print on the page, leaving the shooters of history to sort through the consequences. Alongside the proletariat's last great offensive, in which its prize remains the

muzzle of representation, Dada and Surrealism whimper in finitude as modern man gulps down *Schwarze Milch*.

86.

During the 19th century modernization of art, its executions replaced the order of religious, state, and private patrons with producing on speculation for the market, and subsequently redefined it as the expression of individual genius, or likewise, as the independent entrepreneur incarnating a free individuality which validates the social dominance of collectors while posturing a pseudo-distance from the market. However as the 20th century unfolded, the polarity between creative freedom and market compulsion emerges as a false dichotomy, whereby the applauded ‘uselessness’ of art only *appears* as eluding the laws of universal exchange.

87.

Today, the autonomy of art bears an inadvertent resemblance to the police: both are subject only to immanent criteria and implicitly strive to claim immunity from all external accountability. Never an aberration, this logic is internal to its concept. However, art cannot live up to its concept: “beauty is nothing other than the *promise* of happiness.” Aesthetic judgments are judgments which require bribery. Art inherited from the aristocracy the reluctance to work for a living.

88.

A successful artist among artists doesn’t acknowledge the special status of the artwork and when pressed, balks at the autonomy of art. Nor will she any longer admit of any traction to the romantic propulsion of the creative genius into an ascendency above others. She instead more accurately looks to the artwork as collateral for a private enterprise. Deep down, she recognizes very well the supremacy of exchange. As a result, because artists, for the most part, are vehemently anti-intellectual, against the virtues of clarity, they grovel so low. They make up a sort of bio-material identifiable for what they are at odds to produce: *meaning*.

Their productive moment is a beacon for the oppressed to reflect on their indeterminable length of suffering. The artist's product is a token, as of yet unappraised, by bearing a striking resemblance to the crucifixes taken door to door by evangelical salesmen. This is why every shop in Chelsea keeps at least one cross on display at all times. There isn't a rationalization for the existence of an artist. Smashing mirrors would still permit the viewer's gaze to refract any number of times, until at last his exhaustion found him sitting before a puddle. "That," he would consider, "is what I have to venerate the artist with."

89.

As Marx demonstrated, there exist commodities unlike others. Art as a species of commodity does not follow the same structural determinations as labor-power or its fruit. A momentary effort at deciphering the price of an artwork should demonstrate the reluctance of art to *traditionally* adhere to the critique of political economy. Other mediations must be sought for grasping those commodities that facilitate exchange and yet are not themselves for sale. The political economy of the racket and its goons of informal social pressure are better models with which to index the 'art world' as a moment within the world of the total commodity.

90.

High and low art cannot maintain their separation in a thoroughly *average* world. Mediocrity makes its own rules and sets its own image of success.

91.

It is a natural assumption that in art, before one begins to deal with its content, one must first come to understand communication, grasped as either an instrument or medium with which the content is discovered. Such simplicity customarily includes the uneasiness and anxiety of potentially *miscommunicating*, in grasping clouds of error over the heaven of truth. For Zhdanov this pathology was severe. However, it warrants little exertion to recognize the inseparable quality of form and content to which the one pervades the other,

the very absurdity of the enterprise residing in the assumed independence of the *means* itself, a utility which is somehow not altering the object within its grasp. Rather, the content of employment is dominated by the form of its appearance. Above all else, art edifies the primacy of communication, its singular didactic purpose of instilling the effectiveness of ornamented nullity, unconditionally positing the real content of life by suggesting fulfillment to lie in aesthetic derivatives. Art is at its best during a Powerpoint presentation.

92.

The life of the artist becomes increasingly more important than her work. However, it is no longer possible to scrutinize the artist in terms of specialization without appearing reactionary. Instead, let attention be paid to the manner in which the artist today overshadows her work by selectively circulating their branded name—that is, through the publicity of an *advertised personality*.

93.

The personality is the preliminary mechanism of identity formation realizing itself at a moment when the affirmation of class identity recedes from the horizon and is replaced by an aggregate of segmented interests. It is the generically constituted concretization of an individual's false understanding of oneself *for others*. Since the commodity form of value consists in its movement *for-another*, that is, to be exchanged, a logic of publicity must, somehow, saturate the dynamics of accumulation. For this, to possess personality is to affirm the rational kernel of advertising, to be readily transferable.

94.

Art presently is so highly defined by personality that it can hardly be considered outside of its reception. As a beauty contest necessitates judges, the current tendency of making art is so thoroughly saturated by commentators, collectors, curators, dealers and gallerists, that the work itself is effectively rendered inaccessible. To see the artist as a primary mover would be giving her too much credit. Like everything else, the means of reception are administered

to fill categories designated by more able hands for stocking the shelves.

95.

The idea of the artist as an aggregate of functions—rather than as belonging to any canonical tradition but instead as a set of multitasking career opportunities—molds the artist in the shadow of the creative and risk-taking entrepreneur. With the reinvention of the artist as creative entrepreneur, there can be no great artists anymore, only great curators or interior designers.

96.

The artist and the often collaborative environment of her studio appear as the model worker of the economy today—a creative, deskilled, innovative, and informal atmosphere predominantly structured by freelance, temporary, or makeshift efforts. When work, like art, becomes decreasingly specialized, Relational Aesthetics is, at best, employment training.

97.

Within a chronological structure dictated by the categories of tradition, influence, style, medium, and technique, a lineage of monuments becomes a fragmented unity of objects constituting a motionless picture of immutable values with an eternally similar meaning, that is, an *art history*. For the first time in history the arts of all ages and civilizations can be known, accepted, and compared together, and the fact that it has become possible to collect and recollect all these art-historical memories marks the *end of the world of art*. All art can be accepted equally. As Resnais recalls in his 1953 film, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*, “we recognize Greece in an old African head of 2000 years; Japan in a mask from Logoué; and still India; Sumerian idols; our Roman Christ; or our modern art.” The succession of different styles and forms renders the entire history of art accessible to the consumer. The debris of all periods and past civilizations, commodity society erects a baroque edifice that perfectly embodies an art history subsisting in an epoch without historical depth.

98.

Today the art critic is in the role of the pied piper. As a hired entertainer he narrates to the dutifully ambitious a fiction: the identity of the buoying artist. The story is set in a timeless everywhere and always fraught with challenges to an original vision which through the labor of the artist perseveres. As readers of criticism the sole task is to follow the ascertainment of indexical value determining whether the stakes of valorization were defined accurately. What the critic writes is frequently more convoluted than an artwork's process or content. Compound this with the subsumption of art into publication cycles or digital document dispersion and it all becomes immediately global. It should be no mystery then why artworks now have such an acute diminished presence. It is in fact due to the division of their production to their landed reception. In these contemporary circumstances, it is fair to say, critics are undervalued and highly necessary for the services they render. The critic's proficiency is the seamless decrypting of infantile signs into theoretical juvenilia. The revolving doors of theory redundantly flourishing the post-medium performance of the dematerialized art object with an abundance of academic tchotchkes. Laying down AstroTurf where concept art's mercurial abnegation of meaning poisoned the playing field, the critic absolves the history of art production with a methodology of publicity. Where previously storerooms, galleries, collections, auction houses and museums merely had to keep the merchandise around, now these places have to create an intellectual aura to turn a profit. What then is the libidinal motivation of the critic? Under the shade of a patio umbrella, sitting with a jigsaw puzzle, the critic dreams of shooting a rifle, of participating in the fray. While in actuality he is collaging together standards of sovereignty, ready for battle when he has a sufficiently derivative picture that is manageable to pawn off at openings, conferences, panel discussions, roundtables, lecture series, dinners, hotel rooms, cocktail bars and yoga parlors. In a time when the artist's main sale is their personality, the critic is their chaperone.

99.

When Diderot, bearing witness to the birth of art criticism, states "at the moment when the artist thinks of money, he loses his feeling for beauty", he cannot help but implicitly

pronounce the historical meaninglessness of beauty itself.

100.

The sphere of collecting and the interest accruable by buying, trading and selling artworks on the market has taken the place of the gold standard. No longer to the precious metal goes the haven of financial security, but are instead surpassed by the stability of the artwork. From an article in the *New York Observer*, August 2011: “art is, after all, an investment in culture, whereas gold is an investment in fear.” By collapsing the representation of national currency, the collateral of an artwork projects a figurative lineage upon itself and, for whomsoever intervenes on its behalf, a sovereign mandate of expression allots fortunate ends. Liquidating the turmoil of having to pay soldiers with aureus commensurate with the prospect of imperial growth, the elite happily reconcile among one another, vanguards of wealth with appreciating art indices.

101.

An artist may work for a nation. It is then her duty to supply character traits that can be garnered from her work for the people of her nation. Contemporary state-sponsored art, primarily found in the wealthy Northern European countries and in the Balkans, necessitates that the art contains a discursive element. It is a way of checking in on the artists, and helping them learn to self-police.

An artist may work as another artist’s assistant or for a gallery. Then it is less what he produces as content, and more what it means to be an artist in the stable. Like Rameau’s nephew, a jester must learn what her personality should be.

An artist may work for a social movement. Her professional duties feed the muse of her aesthetics. Her key-chain-compass steadily points east. Cash is not an issue.

An artist may be a self-styled entrepreneur. In other words, hirable. And in that case, it will depend on how her vocation is defined by that hour. When she needs to be creative, she will

create; when she needs to read a contract and sign, she will be a lawyer.

102.

Artists strive to maintain the illusion, perhaps true at the turn of the previous century, that they are the last representatives of the artisans to whom commodity production has dealt a fatal blow. It nevertheless remains the case that “beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty.”

Virtual Experience

Christoph Hesse

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Experience, as if it were one of those cranky vagaries of Heidegger, once meant to go and explore a country and peoples.[1] In approaching the modern age seriously—as a conquering of the world over—this movement of experience disappears and those who are henceforth the sensitive subject lay their claim, regardless of whether they tour the world or withdraw into the Château de Montaigne. Those who never get the opportunity to travel to Italy can at least from stories or books experience something about its marvelous treasures; if of course experience then only refers to stories or printed pictures and text, which could otherwise be even more beautiful than Italy itself. Since the late 19th century, rapidly multiplied techniques of recording, storage, transmission, and duplication have seemingly brought distant realities ever closer, with these possibilities expanding immeasurably. The well-known man of novels who comes to the town from the country and finds everything shuttered has long ago become obsolete; the naif who knows nothing other than the inner circle of one’s own work and family life, has vanished from the interconnected world. To be in the know [*flinkes Bescheidwissen*] jostles itself in place of the traditional illiteracy, accomplished not so much from universal compulsory schooling, but from a culture industry extending across classes and boundaries, now with much more powerful channels at its disposal than film, radio and magazines. However, the feeling of powerlessness keeps haunting even the ad nauseam experienced in the midst of inscrutable economic processes sliding over or at times clamping down on them; and this feeling is being yet again intensified by equally overpowering working technologies. The fully accessible world still appearing as strange and remote as ever has not only scared away the notorious idiocy of rural life; it also left the already dubious capacity for experience to atrophy; a capacity that, amongst other things, would be needed to set up the world in accordance with human needs.

Experience comprises sensual perception [*sinnliche Empfindung*] as well as its mental [*geistige*] reflection, but also a knowledge acquired through colloquially repeated perception or drill— namely, a routine allowing no experience whatsoever. What this commonly refers to is merely “a certain life experience of life such as none of us can avoid”.[2] Such is how E.T.A. Hoffman has Professor Lothario speak in a caricature of vain and stubborn scholars that still seems comical even today not least because the conservative Herr Professor is found to be again provocatively modest and reasonable amongst an audience moaning under an economy of attention [*Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie*]. And right he is: experience, as being temptingly proposed by philosophy since the twilight of scholasticism, plays only a minor part particularly within the intellectual [*geistigen*] sphere where it all comes down to sheer erudition, to capricious intuitions and twisted eloquence. Empirical sciences naturally laying claim to experience reduce it to nothing else but the verifiable description of facts. For empirical observation, there are recording and measuring instruments, and, if necessary, questionnaires, and there is computer software to solve the mathematical problems. However, the effort to gain a notion of mental experience cannot replace a field relying on the method of recording and quantification. Such experience is neither read on the bending of a dial nor represented through diagram. In order to build its concept though, a critique of empiricism is not enough.

Harder than the primacy of formalized methods is the challenge being posed by the substitution of mental [*geistiger*] experience by clever industry. This is what cultural theorists [*Kulturwissenschaftler*]—formerly referred to as humanities scholars [*Geisteswissenschaftler*]—know better than the conventionally unimaginative empiricists. The tempo is being set by internal competition pushing intellectual trends to the fore. Whatever might be en vogue, a world to which one has virtually no relation based on substantive experience, must be either administratively rendered an object or otherwise be invented through ringing words. From this, a considerable part of the business is nourished while rebelling against committing itself to a specified field. From the critique of a technocratic division of labor arises a self-appointed license to universal competence which, by any other name, is the total lack of competence. Lenin once believed that a housewife should be able to run the country. Today a revolutionarily draped philosopher can chat on a train about Lenin and the state alongside the special theory of relativity. The notorious crisis

of the supposedly exotic academic disciplines, which for years have not faced anything really exotic, demonstrates that something like experience is acquired second or third hand at best. Therefore, the droning neologisms express nothing else but an interest in symbolic surplus profit; out of vanity rather than warranted necessity, they create word monstrosities that announce more and more frequently yet another turn and instantly promote corresponding studies. As capital and state-supported discourse confirms, the substance is of no concern to the form.

This is nothing new. The expulsion of spirit from the humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*] doesn't spring from the takeover of electronic media which ought to prescribe what can possibly be thought or spoken. However limited their extent, older writing systems have already done as much and yet it is not clear in what new manner the new media influence or sometimes replace thought and how they form spiritual experience. Written on rattling typewriters, they were no better than dictated struttingly and upright. Eckhard Henscheid reported already in the mid-seventies that Karlheinz Deschner "elaborated the older breed among young German professors: the slob, the oracle, the weary, the semi-divine is in his own professional idiocy striding around empty-headed."[3] A youth armed with Marx and Freud could easily pounce on such a character. But what they only attained was the mimicry of the hated institutions and personalities: "Especially since the end of the student rebellion, the more recently established character has changed only in nuances and retains the same basic substance: showing off in a progressive jack-of-all trades for the large epigones and grand bluffers."[4] This ingenuity, casually labeled as postmodern, in Germany belongs to the history of Critical Theory, ironically, even more so since its intellectual overcoming to a time that the shaky concept of experience was making a career in the parodied shape of self-experience. The few critics of political economy, who acquired appointment and rank following the waning protest movement, already seemed hopelessly dated, at least in comparison with the new character caricatured by Henscheid, which can retrospectively be recognized as a prototype of the now established cultural studies [*Kulturwissenschaft*]. Its sustained success is not simply based on the fact that the object of its occupation can hardly ever be identified and therefore can never be lost. In it is manifested the eternal recurrence of the new. Moreover, it favors the erroneous opinion that lack of aptitude or solely the absence of desire for intellectual integrity would harbor musical or even literary talent; an

inscrutable importance reveals itself in contrived abracadabra and senseless far-flung metaphors. Not accidentally is Walter Benjamin, allegedly abandoned by Horkheimer back then, becoming more and more popular. He, who once ridiculed “the euphemistic lisp of sociology”—afraid to clarify “political objects politically in order to instead wrap them in a web of academic empty phrases”[5]—is today one of the most distinguished sources of shameless lisps. His inexhaustibly rich and indeed equally difficult accessible aesthetic experiences can be easily embraced by those who resolutely monopolize them; they indulge particularly in the opaque elements of his oeuvre which most of all appeal to the—freely adopted from Benjamin—agents of secret content least of all eager for enlightenment.

The philosophers following Structuralism were not the first to pave the way for this kind of cultural studies. The rightly slandered “Frankolatrie”[6], which has long since become transparent as a secret love for German ontology that seems to be just a symptom of the absence of experience [*Erfahrungslosigkeit*]. This, again, does not stop at the voracious reception of “the French people, once so *spirituel*”.[7] One has to look for its reasons elsewhere. The pleasant talk of empty signifiers however, ought to be taken for its word insofar as language is only by way of exception good for expressing that which is experienced and for bringing about particular kinds of experience at all; as a rule, it is instead a digression of its own “knitted tone of voice” [*Tonfallstricke*] (Karl Kraus). Concerning German academic language in particular—whose stale air the *Lebensphilosophie* once sought to escape in a “natural, healthy, fresh, at times coarse”[8] and certainly deceptive form—one can retrace its settling in the German Empire at the latest, in collegial proximity to German state officials. It basically consists of conceited and equally clumsy nominalizations being handed down, as it were, in order to bestow the authority of a certified document on the most dubious formulations. And it maintains that attitude to this day. Additionally, within the softcore section of cultural studies in particular, it has gained a kind of maverick attitude which long ago moved from apartment-sharing communities into advertising agencies. Here, erratic expressions of a borrowed might already serve as self-irony.

In a lofty alienated shape, the whims of cultural studies reveal only the damage being done on a larger scale by the industry of the same name. It is to a considerable extent responsible

for the socialized inability to experience which makes its presence felt even within the sphere of sociological and philosophical terminology. It is not coincidental that the phrase *to gain experience* sounds like a comradely imperative out of advertising's playbook. Experiences become incessantly imposed and are primarily collected in order to accumulate a fitting number as if to prove one's own efficiency. What is to be experienced remains as indifferent as any product in an obstinately increasing production for its own sake. This Sisyphean task of gaining experiences, which is prescribed as useful to anyone willing to risk their neck, belongs to a respectable tradition, after all. Even the bourgeois ideal of education—which would today translate into the optimal assets for self-management—ambitiously came from the assumption that subjectivity was formed not only by a sense of duty and humanistic erudition, however established with inhuman timpani, but also through experience. Yet the capacity for experience is not quite simply human and not indisputably given; nor is it a qualification that could be acquired through diligence. Experience relies on objective conditions; futile to hope, however, it could be rediscovered like something lost in a distant past. It might rather be found proximate to a humanity that does not yet exist. Meanwhile, experience, like the happiness that would be given unexpectedly, seems at all possible only as an exception. As an exception, it would likewise be possible to establish a world in which people were able to experience something other than pressure, fear, deprivation, sorrow and depressing emptiness, as they do now even in the abundant satisfaction of their needs. The material requisites have at least long been created, though under conditions of production which allow the former to constantly yield nothing other than the reproduction of those conditions, and as such, those requisites might become increasingly improbable and ultimately useless for anything else.

Perhaps one has already experienced that which is unregimented experience. Still, one has yet to grasp it through concepts. The danger of falling into whispering incantation is already felt by Goethe, who parodies the jargon of authenticity a century in advance. He sometimes implored a childhood friend to "make plain to me what experience might be? But, because he was full of nonsense, he put me off with fair words from one day to another, and at last, after great preparations, disclosed to me, that true experience was properly when one experiences how an experienced man must experience in experiencing his experience."[9] Experience can be proven only through an object one is actually experiencing. It is bound to

the particular, always an experience of something, which is why every attempt of a generally accepted definition leads into the emptiness, or even worse, into the territories of tautological profundity. Experience is to be conceived from an object, to which a subject surrenders or immerses itself involuntarily. With the dubious concept of intuition, one comes plausibly closer to experience than with the formal critique of knowledge. [*Erkenntniskritik*][10]

Such an emphatic and almost musical concept of experience is, historically, closely bound with the notorious German inwardness. Parallel to the rationalistic critique of knowledge, this concept of experience finds profuse expression in the pathos of subjective sensitivity within the poetry of *Sturm und Drang* which, in a Lutheran manner, swears against French etiquette and yet comprehends the ongoing French *Drang* for political freedom. In Romanticism, this latter motif recurs in strangely draped shapes, sometimes traditional, sometimes chivalrous. But the model of the burgeoning German, innately proud and cranky national sentiment is not the modern nation, i.e. the French Republic, but the declining *Reich* wherein one wishes to retrospectively identify a common destiny through shared language and culture. As from the catastrophic political consequences, however, one ought not to consider the experiences modeled in romantic literature contemptible. The discomfort that may be imposed on today's reader by all seemingly pastoral poetry [*waldursprünglich anmutende Poesie*] also stems from the discomfort of what was already then a rather unsuccessful Enlightenment of which those works are the expression. As such, they throw a dim light on the whole mishap, dragging with it the typically German concept of experience through *Lebensphilosophie* and existentialism. In characterizing the composer Schmucke, one of his novel's characters, Balzac provides a hint that the Germans "cannot draw harmony from the mighty instruments of Liberty, yet to play all instruments of music comes to them by nature."[11] That this is no longer true comes in the end as something of a comfort. It should therefore come as no surprise that if there are "hardly any young people today who dream of becoming great poets or composers", so then among adults are there not only any more fearsome leaders [*Führergestalten*], but perhaps also "no great economic theoreticians among them, and that ultimately there will be no true political spontaneity."[12]

It may nevertheless be surprising that the work of an artist like the scarcely romantic Balzac assumes the experience of an entire epoch, which could not be remotely imaginable today. Whoever today withdraws into his garret [*Dachkammer*] to write a great comedy of their time has there—on their screen—the entire world before their eyes. Yet the world lays not at their feet, but rises unassailably above their head. Surely to its inhabitants two hundred years ago, the world might have seemed to make sense, insofar as there was still a justifiable hope of someday redeeming at least the promises of freedom and equality. Whereas, Beckett wrote novels on the absence of meaning, where experience gives expression to a farcical expenditure unwavering in continued nonsense, most vividly illustrated by Molloy's sophisticated system of stone-sucking.[13] All the pertinent conclusions about fragmentation and distraction, which one gladly gives as an excuse to justify his own unsatisfying handicraft, perhaps only conceal the much graver finding that, along with spontaneity, imagination too, on which both artistic production and aesthetic experience subsist, got lost somewhere. Whether and under what conditions they might resurface in a world that tenders itself with users with clueless pride for an information or knowledge society, remains to be seen. Cultural critics reasonably make automated technologies, and the associated hustle and bustle, responsible for literature to merge into the puntuality of word processing. However already under similar pressure, Balzac, the "little novel factory,"[14] accumulated his manuscripts. Unregimented experience is not to be confused with a life on the farm, nor with immediacy. Access to the world that appears to be completely immediate, without the mediation of a technical medium, does not determine in advance whether or not authentic experiences occur. A stroll through the forest guarantees just as little as a trip to the cinema.

As so little can positively be said about unregimented experience in general—since the particular which makes it as such is lost in universal determinations—so can it not be directly indicated how technical media and their products form sensuous as well as spiritual experience; how they enrich experience with unexpected possibilities or deprive it of whatever kind of substance. The specific conditions under which some medium provide the possibility for experience are not to be misunderstood from the outset as regimentation. No one engaged in literature would claim that the rules of language, which must be known and respected, obstruct the path to possible experiences. Regarding photography, or, more

precisely, the particular form in which this medium is employed under present circumstances, Siegfried Kracauer in 1927 melancholically remarked:

"Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense. Most of the images in the illustrated magazines are topical photographs, which refer to existing objects. The reproductions are thus basically signs which may remind us of the original object that was supposed to be understood. The demonic diva. In reality, however, the weekly photographic ration does not at all mean to refer to these objects or ur-images. If it were offering itself as an aid to memory, then memory would have to determine the selection. But the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. […] In the illustrated magazines, people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. The spatial continuum from the camera's perspective dominates the spatial appearance of the perceived object: the resemblance between the image and the object effaces the contours of the object's “history.” Never before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding. Even the colorful arrangement of the images provides a not insignificant means for successfully implementing such a strike. The *contiguity* of these images systematically excludes their contextual framework available to consciousness. The “image-idea” drives away the idea. The blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what the things mean."[15]

Many years later, feeling at home exiled in New York, Kracauer would entrust the photographic nature of film with the redemption of external reality. The knowledge of its inner relations, which once should have provided history with a fortunate turn, had proven unreliable in practice.

Whatever technical media may adjust or first make recognizable, art, by all means—traditionally an area where experience shall and must prove itself in the gentlest of ways beyond practical ends—has thereby first and foremost only expanded. The overproduction of technical media clearly results from increased technological and commercial possibilities

as well as the conventional opinion, which has become infinitely generous, about what is already or is still art. A distinction between seriousness and entertainment has rightly long been abandoned. Even the most serious art is never so boring as to cease entertaining you. The more tricky distinction is between seriousness and play. This distinction is unsuitable to separate high and low, good from bad art from above, but rather permeates all art. Even serious thoughts on art part company with it. Marx claimed that artistic production, by its very own nature hostile to capitalist production, is “the most damnably serious”[16], and shall thus remain, even if one day a life of free association would be playfully easy to manage. Unexpectedly, it is Schiller’s often condemned idea of art as a cheerful game that comes closer to the present moment, in that life, on the other hand, has really remained horribly serious. Although it is not so serious that anyone would still expect a humanity fallen apart into more or less abominable cultures to enter into a history of its own making. Nor does anyone expect anything from aesthetic education. Within art, the game looks more like “the impotence of certified people that can represent itself as omnipotent. Those prohibited from doing anything useful need not bother to consider purpose; their ‘creative playroom’ [*Gestaltungsspielraum*] is without limit, as of a child’s sandbox where he bakes his cake.”[17]

It is hard to dismiss the impression that despite all the fabulous technical possibilities, the level of aesthetic productive forces decreases tendentially quicker than the average rate of profit. But it is even more difficult to grasp it conceptually. Noticeable at present is a certain indifference, if not bewilderment, towards the historical development of respective art forms. In them above all does experience condense itself. With a loss of tension [*Spannungsverlust*] in the history of art, the extent to which history still takes place appears questionable, as Adorno already said in the 1950s. The tradition of art, as well as the struggle against its obligations, are lost and consequently carried away “in an empty, merry ride” (Kafka).[18] It seems that not only art finds itself on such a ride. All together, the relations of production today resemble less a steel cage, which could give some the obvious idea of breaking out, than the pot from the fairy tale which threatens to suffocate the hungry with its incessantly overflowing porridge. To bring it to a halt, the magic word would have to be spoken. In the fairy tale, it is the returning child that says: “Stop, little pot!”

Experience is only made by those with hope.

Footnotes

[1.] Old High German *irfaran* (circa 800 AD), Middle High German ervarn: to travel, to drive through, to pull through, to arrive, to seek. Cf. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, edited by Wolfgang Pfeifer, 293. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995. In addition, see Günther Anders. *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Bd. 1: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1988), 114f.
[2.] E.T.A. Hoffmann. *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (London: Penguin, 1999), 186.
[3.] Eckhard Henscheid. "Wie dumm darf ein deutscher Professor sein? Eine akute Fallstudie," *Meine Jahre mit Sepp Herberger: Neue Feuilletons* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1999), 100.
[4.] Ibid.
[5.] Walter Benjamin. Review of S. Kracauer "Die Angestellten," *Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. III*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 226-228.
[6.] Klaus Laermann, "Lacancan und Derridada," *Die Zeit* 23, 30.5 (1986).
[7.] Karl Marx. *Capital Vol. I.* MECW Vol. 35, trans. Samuel Moore & Eduard Aveling. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 705.
[8.] Martin Heidegger. "Zur Enthüllung seines Denkmals in Kreenheinstetten am 15. August 1910," *Gesamtausgabe. I. Abteilung. Bd. 15*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), 1.
[9.] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life*, trans. John Oxenford (London: Thirteen Books, 1848), 261.
[10.] Cf. Theodor W. Adorno's discussion of Bergson in *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 45-47.
[11.] Honoré de Balzac. *Poor Relations: Cousin Betty and Cousin Pons*, trans. James Warring and Ellen Marriage (The Floating Press, 2014), 594.
[12.] Theodor W. Adorno. "Theory of Pseudo-Culture [*Halbbildung*]," trans. Deborah Cook. *Telos* 95 (Spring 1993) 15-26.
[13.] Cf. Samuel Beckett. *Molloy*, trans. Patrick Bowles (London: Faber & Faber, 2009),

114.

[14.] Wolfgang Pohrt. *Der Geheimagent der Unzufriedenheit: Balzac, Ruckblick auf die Moderne* (Berlin: Tiamat, 1990), 9.

[15.] Siegfried Kracauer. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 58.

[16.] Karl Marx. “Economic Manuscripts of 1857-61.” *MECW Vol. 28*, trans. Ernst Wangermann (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 530. Despite this English translation of *Ernst* into “difficult”, the present work has opted for “serious” in order to maintain the conceptual continuity of the passage.

[17.] Wolfgang Pohrt. *Brothers in Crime: Die Menschen im Zeitalter ihrer Überflüssigkeit* (Berlin: Tiamat, 2000), 110.

[18.] See Theodor W. Adorno. *Nachgelassene Schriften: Ästhetik 1958/59* (Frankfurt am Main: Theodor W. Adorno Archiv – Berlin, 1993ff). Bd. IV.3 (Frankfurt am Main: Eberhard Ortland, 2009), 243f.

AN OLYMPIAN STRETCH

An unbalanced tandem between Martha Rosler and Ben Morea

A PLAY

The frame is, indeed, the window through
which the painter looks at his model, and
nothing could be more offensively inartistic
than this brutal attempt to trust the model
on the hither-side of this window!
(Whistler)

The following transcription is of a palaver that took place between Martha Rosler, Ben Morea and an audience in lower Manhattan in January of 2012. The atmosphere of the city at the time was gushing with political ebullience that would soon wane.

<u>CHARACTER MASKS</u>:

MARTHA ROSLER
BEN MOREA

<u>PAINTED MASKS</u>:

ARCHITECT
GOAT-FOOTED BOY
OLD MAN
POPULIST
WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT
CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK, consists of 4 masks

<u>WHITE MASKS</u>:

ETERNAL STUDENT
OLDER MAN
PLOTINUS
SOCIAL DEMOCRAT
WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT

CHORUSES:

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK, consists of 4 masks
CHORUS OF WHITE MASK, consists of 6 masks

ACT ONE
SCENE I

Manhattan, NY. aerobics classroom, at the back of a gym.

[*Attached to the stage is a side-by-side tandem exercise bicycle. Each set of the pedals is mechanically synchronized. The turn of one set will turn them both. In front of the bicycle is a long bench with its short end facing the front wheels. To the audience, the bicycle begins on the right with the bench perpendicular and almost in the center of the stage. The backstage is draped by a curtain and separates the room from the rest of the gym. There is one large window on the left side of the stage. Beside the window and visible to the audience is one simple chair. We can hear the rain outside.*

The only light in the room flickers on and off. PLOTINUS *is standing on top of the bench trying to fix the light above him. With the first flashes of the trembling light, we can see another figure. It is* BEN MOREA *sleeping on the right seat of the tandem bicycle.*

The curtain, at the back of the stage, fills with a clumsy stir. Behind its folds someone, with a subdued exasperation, struggles to find the inlet. PLOTINUS *slightly turns his head towards this movement. With the sound of ripping fabric* MARTHA ROSLER *wades into the room. She is wet from the rain and is noticeably peeved with the inclement weather and*

her trek in arriving. She takes off her nylon kerchief and raincoat and hangs them to dry on the chair at the back of the room. Underneath she appears to be wearing a tight deep blue jumpsuit. She proceeds to the centre of the room and in the same assured peeve puts both of her hands on the bench next to PLOTINUS *while still standing, pressing her weight down to the bench to ensure* PLOTINUS*' balance.*

Shortly after MARTHA ROSLER *more participants start to arrive. With a small interval three pairs of guests enter the room: first* ARCHITECT *with* OLD MAN, *then* POPULIST *with* SOCIAL DEMOCRAT *and finally* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT *along with* GOAT-FOOTED BOY. SOCIAL DEMOCRAT *volunteers for the role of concierge. He folds up and pulls on a side the curtain to make the subsequent entries easier.* PLOTINUS*, while still atop the bench, nods to him with a silent gratitude. Everyone is standing in the middle of the room, around the bench, waiting to be seated. A few remaining guests are arriving at last.* OLDER MAN *walks in and with an open smile proceeds to* PLOTINUS. *They shake hands.* ETERNAL STUDENT*, out of breath, runs in with some enormous grocery bags.*

PLOTINUS *manages to fix the light and descends to the floor.* MARTHA ROSLER *now walks towards the bicycle and not without difficulty climbs up next to a sleeping* BEN MOREA.

PLOTINUS *arranges the guests across the bench, straddled, one behind another in the following order:* ARCHITECT, POPULIST *behind him, then* OLD MAN, WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT, OLDER MAN, SOCIAL DEMOCRAT, ETERNAL STUDENT *and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *at the very end.*

The audience quiets. PLOTINUS *hands* MARTHA ROSLER *a remote control. At the same time the curtain parts and* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *walks in on her tippy toes. She takes a seat on the bench right in front of* ARCHITECT *and as such becomes the first one in the row. Everyone is forced to squeeze tighter and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *scarcely holds on to his position.*

MARTHA ROSLER *pushes a button on the remote control - nothing happens.* MARTHA ROSLER *fumbles for a few seconds. Abruptly the sound of Mario Savio speaking at a student rally at UC Berkeley in 1964 fills the room. While the sound plays,* MARTHA ROSLER *still struggles to figure out buttons on the remote control and accidentally pushes one. Now it is playing J.R. Oppenheimer speaking about the atomic bomb.* POPULIST *fidgets in his seat.* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *sneaks through the curtain into the room and settles in a relaxed pose on the floor aside the bench and across from the tandem bicycle.* MARTHA ROSLER *pauses the sound.*]

MARTHA ROSLER: [*in a raspy voice*]: We can talk or do you want to see more images?

PLOTINUS: But didn't you prepare something? […]

MARTHA ROSLER: [*clearing her throat*]: Yeah, but wouldn't you rather look at some images?

PLOTINUS: I think looking at the pictures is usually a good way to begin a discussion.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*cheers MARTHA ROSLER with a friendly laughter*]: Pictures! Pictures!

MARTHA ROSLER: I feel it is important for me to explain something. [*takes a deep breath suggesting the seriousness of what she is going to say next*] A few weeks ago I was asked to give a presentation at MOMA. I had 10 minutes to talk about my work. Instead, I decided to talk [*with an emphasis*] for 5 minutes, about the conditions that have grounded my work. I've put together a bunch of images [*out of breath*] that have something to do with it. You all have to recognize that whatever I have chosen is very partial. I threw some other things in there as well. It's like I walked into the pantry, I saw some fifteen things there and I threw them into this pot. [*absently*] People are usually curious about the genesis of my generation. Our generation. [*she nods towards* BEN MOREA *then looks around*] Of course, one of the first movies I remember seeing was 'Battleship Potemkin' which was played socially quite

regularly by young people. So I went and saw it with my boyfriend. And it was, you know, just: wow!

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*echoes with a peal of laughter*]: Wow!

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupted, she stutters and struggles to remember her rehearsed narrative*]: And, and my friend, huh, my boyfriend… [*laughs awkwardly to herself*] You must be thinking I am drunk. [*squeezes remote in her hand and pushes random buttons*]

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*to* MARTHA ROSLER]: I think you should take a pill.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*laughs disjointedly*]: Pill?

MARTHA ROSLER: A pill?! Of what?

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*laughs uneasy*]: Of what? Of what?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: It's a homeopathic pill, and I think it will help you. [CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *relieves their tension through a burst of nervous laughter*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*tries to get the crowd's attention*]: So right, my childhood. It arrived at the age of the grotesque Cuban crisis. [she looks around the room] I see that now the garbage workers' strike is very popular in a… a... the art world. [*after pausing, she continues without the crowd's enthusiasm*] I remember in high school we were advised not to sign anything in support of the striking workers because if you sign the card, you might never get a job for the rest of your life! [*resignedly*] But we signed them anyway!

[ARCHITECT *coughs into the silence of the room, which is not sure whether or not they should be impressed*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*she continues very fast*]: You'll think this is ridiculous, such a zealous

moment. I drove to the march in Washington DC with some friends. I also attended a talk at Brooklyn College by Malcolm X. He was speaking to a room smaller than this one. [*gesturing to a sleeping* BEN MOREA] Maybe I wasn't friends with Bobby Seale or Huey Newton, but I was friends with Angela Davis and her sister Fania! You wouldn't believe it, but on the West Coast we were also active. It wasn't exactly a student movement, and yet it was. America was in flames—urban insurrections—in Detroit and other places. Black and white people were rising together. Those cities were well punished for that. And, of course, Maoism... [*to herself with discontent*] This should have appeared earlier. [*accidentally pushes a button on the remote control and an image projects on to the wall. Not to appear surprised, she continues as if it happened just as she intended*] Sorry, this is pixelated. This is the House Un-American Activities Committee, the House of Representatives. This is still before my time, but it is very important for us to know that students actually went and protested. And also in my school I happened to disobey, not too little a disobedience either. Before that, I was basically a good girl. But one day I got together with a group of friends. I heard them saying: "We are gonna go out and stand in [*her voice wavers*] City Hall park." As a result, my parents practically disowned me. For their motto was: do as we do and say as we say. It was a different generation.

SCENE II

Same room.

[*Iron weight plates and aluminum collars thrown on the ground, moving on and off the dumbbells and barbells, make distinct noise from behind the curtain. Everyone on the bench looks towards the direction of the sound.* BEN MOREA *wakes. Using the opportunity while everyone is still distracted,* PLOTINUS *walks quickly to* BEN MOREA's *bicycle and helps* BEN MOREA *to change from a plush brown gown into a cream color two-piece sport suit. Seemingly from nowhere, a cup of tea appears in* BEN MOREA's *hand. These changes don't seem to evoke anyone's interest.* MARTHA ROSLER *is evidently annoyed by the interruption.*

Metallic cacophony rises to its peak and then stops altogether. CHORUS OF WHITE

MASK *enters the room; all are wearing virgin-white, heavy, down to the floor bathrobes, some of them with white towels hanging around their necks. Standing with casual but nevertheless sculpturesque demeanor, they group behind the bench. At the same time,* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *gets up off the floor and walks to the left corner of the room to the window for a cigarette break.* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *joins them.* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *blows smoke and laughs at a hokey anecdote told by* GOAT-FOOTED BOY]

MARTHA ROSLER: Yes, yes, right. [*very conscious of the time*] There were also international movies.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*to himself*]: Huh?

MARTHA ROSLER [*continues excitedly, automatically pushing on the pedals*]: And of course, the tremendous bombshell of May 68 we hoped would provide a model for labor and students to unite. Well, we hoped. But of course, that's exactly what did not happen. So, the dream was postponed. There were also constant images of the bombing on TV and in LIFE Magazine. Oh god! Wasn't that awful? [*everyone seems to think it was, in fact, awful and laughs uncomfortably*] Sorry. Well, it was already the end of the 60s, let's put it that way, and the raising of the Pentagon…

[BEN MOREA *opens his mouth for the first time, but instead of words produces a drawn out yawn*]

Yes, yes, the Pentagon! The rise of certain men in the Pentagon. In an effort to drive them out, we ended up at Woodstock and in Central Park. Yes, my dears, in Central Park, we were the 'be-ins'. We held Central Park. There were numerous 'be-ins' in the 60s.

[*the audience indicates confusion*]

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*into the crowd*]: Be-ins! Yes, be-in! They called them b-e-i-n-g! It's a thing!

POPULIST [*squeamishly*]: Please!

OLDER MAN [*almost to himself*]: Yes, of course.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*to* MARTHA ROSLER]: We need some dictionaries! [*laughs hysterically*]

[*both* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *and* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *burst out in laughter*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*tries to speak over the laugh*]: This was an occupation! There were numerous ones in New York. [*energetically*] We were the human beings at the be-ins.

[GOAT-FOOTED BOY, WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT, PLOTINUS, WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT, SOCIAL DEMOCRAT, OLD MAN, OLDER MAN *and* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *are still engaging over the semantics of the 'be-in'*. MARTHA ROSLER *takes the opportunity and finds an image of the 'be-ins'*]

First, there were sits-ins. Yes, yes, seriously, this was the trajectory! [*no one seems to object or even to pay any attention*] And then there were be-ins! And they tilted [*apologetically*] slightly towards the hippy side.

[*everyone laughs indulgently*]

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*breaking through the last outbreak of cackling, to* MARTHA ROSLER *ironically*]: Slightly or, let's say, completely?

SOCIAL DEMOCRAT: Slightly towards the marijuana-friendly side! [*everyone giggles*]

MARTHA ROSLER: Political people did not smoke marijuana.

BEN MOREA: [*speaking for the first time*]: Not if they drank they didn't!

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*pointing at the projected slide*]: Look! They look so sober!

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK: They do look sober.

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK: They were not.

MARTHA ROSLER [*between her teeth*]: It's all going the wrong way. [out loud] And then finally when our parties were mobilized to go out, I mean on both coasts. [*awkward pause, while she struggles to remember her presentation*] And 1967. As a result of certain events. I am talking about the Stonewall rebellion and, of course, about the American Indian Movement. I must mention the environmentalism. Rachel Carson's book came out, I think, in 1964, 63. Something like this. Very important also was 'Big Blue Marble', a TV show that came out in the 70s. And yes of course, the revolutions in Angola and in Mozambique and then, unfortunately, the counter-revolution in Chile. [*looking around the room*] Remember Pinochet?

POPULIST [*very quietly, to himself*]: The counter-revolution in Chile that was conducted under Kissinger?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*very loud, to the whole room*]: Under Kissinger!

MARTHA ROSLER [*triumphantly*]: Under Kissinger and Nixon! He was our President.

[*the room fills with an injured snuffle*]

Did I mention that in 1982 there was a 'giant'—there were a million people standing in Central Park!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*very surprised*]: strike in Central Park?

ARCHITECT: It was a demo.

MARTHA ROSLER [*to* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT]: A demo.

ARCHITECT: An anti-nuclear demo.

MARTHA ROSLER: An anti-nuclear demo in Central Park!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*still very surprised*]: A nuclear demo in Central Park?

ARCHITECT: An anti-nuclear demo in Central Park.

MARTHA ROSLER: A million people in Central Park.

ARCHITECT: Maybe a million.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: One million?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: One million.

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK: A million.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK: In Central Park.

MARTHA ROSLER [*very slow with an emphasis on every single word*]: A – million – people – in – Central – Park.

[*both* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *and* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *break out in a short, joined laughter of reverence. Meanwhile,* MARTHA ROSLER *pushes more buttons on the remote control and finds a picture to engage with*]

This is pepper spraying in Seattle.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: WTO?

MARTHA ROSLER: Yeah. This is 1999. So, you shouldn't get confused.

OLDER MAN [*confusedly mishearing*]: The original pepper steak?!

[CHORUS OF WHITE MASK, CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK, WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *unite in a jolly laughter*]

MARTHA ROSLER: It is the original photo of pepper spraying.

POPULIST: The police chief who authorized the use of pepper spray goes around the country now saying it was a big mistake.

MARTHA ROSLER [*agreeably*]: I know! Isn't he! Yeah, Norman Stamper! I worked with him when he was an assistant police chief in San Diego in the early 70s. And then he devolved!

[*everyone chuckles a bit*]

There are things that are expected from you when you are an assistant police chief. You know, it's a thing: it's not the man, it's the role.

SOCIAL DEMOCRAT: Yes, as soon as he retired, I guess, he became that fascist who realized the mistake he had made.

MARTHA ROSLER: You can hear him on 'Democracy Now' these days.

SCENE III

Same room.

[MARTHA ROSLER *nods to* PLOTINUS, *who immediately disappears behind the curtain. He comes back with a bright yoga mat and unfurls it. Under* MARTHA ROSLER*'s heavy gaze, he lays out a set of books that were stacked behind the curtain.* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *along with* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *are enjoying their cigarette break next to the window.* BEN MOREA *walks over to the window, turning down an offered cigarette. When the books are finally covering most of the mat, everyone returns to their prior positions.*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*pointing at the yoga mat on the floor*]: These are the books that I've actually read.
[the room is saturated with a gloomy awe of respect.]
It's true. I am not just throwing some random books at you. Well, you know, I am not about that. Many of these books constitute the formation of the student revolts already in the 50s. Examples like Paul Goodman and his brother Percival are surely obvious. As you can see, here is a book by C. Wright Mills. Also, of course, you see *Theory of the Leisure Class* by Veblen.

[*there seems to be an agreement within the audience that the last title deserves a cruel sneer.* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *walks over to the yoga mat and forms a circle around the books*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*to* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK]: I still have a lot more than what covers this mat.

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*struck*]: No!

MARTHA ROSLER: A lot more!

[*the room is unresponsive and increasingly weary*]

We read magazines like Ramparts but also much riskier magazines about insurrection.

[CHORUS OF WHITE MASK, *still surrounding the yoga mat on the floor, has a sudden fit of cough. His peers try to soothe his discomfort by patting his back and fetching him a glass of water. During this minor disturbance,* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *pays no regard to the books on the floor. Books are being stepped on and kicked off the mat.* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *attempts to laugh. The audience is very concerned about the coughing.* MARTHA ROSLER *nevertheless continues to talk and brings the room to a further exhaustion*.]

Did I mention that I went to Brooklyn College? It was the school that fired the president Harry Gideonse in order to clear out the reds. [forgetting what she wanted to say, she stutters] During the Berkeley student movement, my partner and I and two others—two nice white boys. [*stretching*] Actually, Jewish middle class. Our campus was predominantly Jewish—Jewish middle class slash working class. But mostly, of course, middle class. At the same time in the 60s, in Brooklyn, where I am from, women were not particularly active. So, I went to California. There, with the women's liberation movement, I felt I should be a part of every event and march, not just student movements: anti-war protests and working class strikes. Still, in general, women would do their thing separately. So, now I am realizing that I happened to be one of their first propagandists and as a result, we produced and wrote our own material. We've marched at the head of most marches and many demos. [*she lowers her voice and continues with severity*] This is my own slice of history. A lot, of course, was left out.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK, CHORUS OF WHITE MASK, GOAT-FOOTED BOY, SOCIAL DEMOCRAT, WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT, WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT, OLD MAN, ARCHITECT *followed by the rest of the audience burst out laughing, thus signaling a long-awaited break*.

During the break, everyone gets out of their seat and wanders around the room. MARTHA ROSLER *climbs down her half of the tandem and picks up her books, still spread around the floor. After putting them all behind the curtain again, she joins* ARCHITECT, WOMAN

WITH AN ACCENT *and* SOCIAL DEMOCRAT. *Meanwhile,* PLOTINUS *and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *help* BEN MOREA *to get off his half of the tandem. BEN MOREA slowly walks to the center of the room where he remains standing and thinking about something with a smile. One at a time, every audience member gathers around* BEN MOREA, *except for* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *and* MARTHA ROSLER. *They are still standing aside.* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *is talking while* MARTHA ROSLER *is listening.*]

ACT TWO

SCENE I

Same room.

[PLOTINUS *mounts atop a still empty bench in the middle of the room and claps to announce the end of the break. He then gets down and directs the audience to their seats on the bench. During the break, both* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *and* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *enjoyed each other's company. Following directions given by* PLOTINUS, *they divide and stand behind the bench just a stone's throw away from each other.* BEN MOREA *accompanied by* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *walks to the tandem and mistakenly gets on* MARTHA ROSLER'*s half.* MARTHA ROSLER *takes note but says nothing. She is the last one to be seated*.]

PLOTINUS: I think that the goal of tonight's discussion was, to kind of, think about, to think of the role that students played in the movement back then. And to think about the changes and to think about the present. But maybe before we do that [*smiling to* BEN MOREA] it would be good, Ben, if you could, I know, you are probably tired by now, but if you maybe could tell us about your very different experience from your time in New York? You know, part of the reason we wanted you to talk tonight was because you were involved in the occupation at Columbia. But at the same time, at least Black Mask, seemed to have, let's say, a very ambivalent relation to the students and their movement, like an organized movement. So maybe you can talk a little? We can ask you some specific questions, if you like, to help you?

BEN MOREA [*into absolute silence*]: Yeah, that would be good. [*after a pause*] I could answer questions if somebody has any questions, why not? [*Pauses. To* MARTHA ROSLER] What's your name again?

MARTHA ROSLER [*taken by surprise*]: Martha.

BEN MOREA: Martha.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*in a whisper*]: Martha. Martha. Martha.

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK [*audibly*]: Martha Rosler.

BEN MOREA: Yeah Martha. Martha. While Marsha was talking I was thinking. Michael Harrington wrote a book The Other America.

MARTHA ROSLER [*looking at the floor*]: Right.

BEN MOREA [*continues to look at* MARTHA ROSLER]: When you were talking, I was thinking that there was another left wing. Your experience is just so different than mine!

MARTHA ROSLER [*still looks at the floor beneath her, quietly*]: Oh really?

BEN MOREA: Not in any critical sense. I was happy to hear you talking.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *takes a breath of relief*]

Our experiences are just so different. Like within my group, like, when you talked about women, the women in my group, they were equals. In some ways they chose to do certain things themselves. They would tell us: "this is what we chose to do, this is what we do, you can come with us or you stay home."

MARTHA ROSLER: What year was that?

BEN MOREA [*not hearing* MARTHA ROSLER*'s question*]: I mean they were warriors, the women in my gang.

MARTHA ROSLER: What year?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*loud*]: What year was that?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*louder*]: What year was that?

BEN MOREA: What?

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK, CHORUS OF WHITE MASK, WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT, PLOTINUS, GOAT-FOOTED BOY: What year was that?

BEN MOREA: Aaa… starting… sixty… six.

MARTHA ROSLER [*skeptical*]: Huh?

BEN MOREA: I mean these women, they were strong. They were, they were armed…

MARTHA ROSLER [*gives off a long and sardonic*]: Whoa!

BEN MOREA [*meditatively*]: They were really strong.

MARTHA ROSLER: Where was this?

BEN MOREA: In New York, in the lower east side. [*pauses for a few seconds*] And like, for instance, when we broke into the Pentagon - and, you know, we were the only people in history to break through the door of the Pentagon—the women, they went in with us. [*pause*] And then, you know, how you were talking about Herbert, Herbert Marcuse, his

stepson was in my ‘family’. I met with Herbert quite a bit. [*long pause*]

PLOTINUS [*to both* MARTHA ROSLER *and* BEN MOREA]: You guys have a connection there.

BEN MOREA: He was always…

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupting* BEN MOREA, *to* PLOTINUS]: What?

PLOTINUS: Ben and you have a connection.

MARTHA ROSLER: We have a connection?

[*everyone laughs except* BEN MOREA]

MARTHA ROSLER [*through the laughter*]: Herbert! Herbert! Ha, ha, ha, Herbert!

BEN MOREA [*continues with seriousness*]: I’ve always expressed negative views about the intellectual left. Especially Marxism! Like, we were very ‘anti-Marxist’.

MARTHA ROSLER [*quietly with sarcasm*]: Really?

BEN MOREA: We felt that Marx led us to an authoritarian society. And so, not only were we anti-capitalists, we were anti-Marxists. [*pauses for a few moments and then again refers to* MARTHA ROSLER] You were talking about ‘the black struggle’. Like, Eldridge Cleaver once asked me to run for vice-president. I told him: “I am an anarchist!”

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*giggles*]: He’s an anarchist.

BEN MOREA: And I laughed too. There was a man called James Carr, he wrote a book called Bad and he said in this book that Bobby Seale had this fantasy about making Ben Morea an honorary member of the Black Panthers. Our ‘family’ was the only group that the

Panthers accepted as equals. And we did a lot of things with them. In fact, when they came to New York, because it was so ‘hot’ in California, they were afraid to be armed, because there was recently a battle between them and the nationalists. So they asked us to bodyguard them. [*turning to* MARTHA ROSLER] So our experiences are so different!

MARTHA ROSLER [*with a smirk, looking into the crowd*]: Well, I am trying not to talk about the illegal things that we did.

[BEN MOREA *laughs with a wide-open mouth*]

No! I am totally serious.

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*to* MARTHA ROSLER]: You’re trying not to speak about what?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*to* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT]: The illegal things.

MARTHA ROSLER [*defensively*]: Yeah, I’d rather not go on record speaking about the illegal things that we did. But…

BEN MOREA [*interrupting* MARTHA ROSLER]: But you showed us those images…

MARTHA ROSLER: But it did not carry the weight.

[BEN MOREA, CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK and GOAT-FOOTED BOY *laugh wholeheartedly*]

BEN MOREA [*getting serious*]: Like, you know, like, for instance, I had a falling out with the Libertarian League over Fidel. Because I supported the Cuban Revolution. They were very anti-Fidel because of the Marxism. I first was supporting the Revolution, but slowly, I began to realize that they were right. Because as Fidel came to power, he eliminated the leftists and anarchists. He had them killed including Cienfuegos, who was much more

anarchistic. He had him killed.

MARTHA ROSLER: Really?

BEN MOREA [*goes on*]: And the people that I associated with, the Libertarian League, they were in Spain at the same time as the Lincoln Brigade. And they liked to talk to each other about how many of them could be killed by the Stalinists.

MARTHA ROSLER [*with growing interest*]: Uh-huh.

BEN MOREA: I had two friends in the Libertarian League who were about to be executed by the Marxist firing squad! Though they were freed by Durruti. So, [*to* MARTHA ROSLER] you know, when I saw your books, I had a very negative feeling about that. Maybe I shouldn't bring it up?

MARTHA ROSLER: Huh?

BEN MOREA: Negative feelings about Marxism. And I think we could all see what happened, in Russia, for instance…

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupting* BEN MOREA *confidently*]: We could see what happened in Greece a few months ago. I wish we could talk about that as well.

BEN MOREA: Right. And people always blame Stalin. But he just followed Trotsky and Lenin. Like when you talked about women. There was a woman in Russia named Alexandra Kollontai.

MARTHA ROSLER [*echoes* BEN MOREA]: Kollontai, yes.

BEN MOREA: She was one of the strongest revolutionaries in Russia. [*digs into his pocket and pulls out a box of raisins. chews loudly*] And she was killed by Trotsky and Lenin. [*looks around the room. In solemn silence, still chewing*] Her whole group was wiped out by

them. And I've met with Raya. I don't really know how to say her name…

MARTHA ROSLER: Dunaevsk-A-ya.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*in a loud whisper argues with one another about the right pronunciation*]: Dun-A-yevska? Dunayevsk-A-ya? Duna-YE-vska?

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK: Duna-YE-vska-YA.

BEN MOREA [*confidently*]: Dun-AY-skaya!

MARTHA ROSLER [*disagreeably*]: Dunayevsk-A-ya.

BEN MOREA: I met with her. I went to her home in Detroit because she wanted to meet me. And the conversation came up about Trotsky cos she was his secretary…

[MARTHA ROSLER *makes a sound, indicating her own familiarity with the subject*]

And she was there when Trotsky was killed. And she was talking to me about him. She was crying. And I said, I said: "You know, I don't mean to be rude, but I think I should leave now. You are crying about Trotsky! But what Trotsky did to Kollontai—he got back!"

[*the room is dramatically quiet.*]

MARTHA ROSLER: What I was gonna say: I am actually very sympathetic to what you were saying. [*softly*] My excuse for not talking about all of this is Amazon. Many books were not available there.

[*consonant laughter.*]

Do you think it's funny? [*defensively*] I wanted to show you more book covers. I was actually looking for Alexandra Kollontai. And also, of course… [*to* BEN MOREA] I know

you won’t accept this: I was also looking for Rosa Luxemburg.

BEN MOREA [*interrupting*]: Rosa Luxemburg! Nobody ever talks about them. Actually, they were the real women of liberation. Way back!

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupting* BEN MOREA]: Yeah? Yeah… And Emma Goldman.

BEN MOREA: Yeah. And Emma.

[*An automatic digital voice emanates from an unknown source announcing: “It’s ten o’clock.” Everyone breaks out into hysterics with a few attempting to clap. Through the laughter and unsynchronized clapping,* BEN MOREA’s *voice can be heard: “Who was that?”*]

SCENE II

Same room.

[CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *assumes that it is the right moment to take a break and disappears behind the curtain.* PLOTINUS, *however, gives a signal to the audience to remain in their seats. Vital chatter slowly turns into contagious yawning*.]

ARCHITECT [*gets up in his seat with an enviable confidence. The room around him quiets*]: Alright. I think it is my responsibility to remind you all that the New Left of the 60s rejected the Old Left.

MARTHA ROSLER: Exactly.

OLDER MAN [*to himself*]: Whatever that means.

ARCHITECT [*continues*]: I come from an anti-communist family background.

MARTHA ROSLER [*with solidarity*]: Me too!

ARCHITECT [*continues faster, with the same confidence, neglecting* MARTHA ROSLER*'s remarks*]: I can't say I am proud of it, but I am not ashamed to say I wasn't a red diaper baby. Alright? I came out from a very strong anti-communist family background.

MARTHA ROSLER: Same.

ARCHITECT [*repeats louder*]: I came out from a very strong anti-communist family background.

MARTHA ROSLER [*also louder*]: Me too!

ARCHITECT [*with aplomb*]: My generation was first radicalized in the 60s.

MARTHA ROSLER: Our generation!

ARCHITECT: My own family with their strong anti-communist beliefs did not support me.

MARTHA ROSLER: Same here.

ARCHITECT: Let me remind you that every year, every year we felt like it was a different year. Alright? You would see the distinctive difference between the people who came to be radicalized in 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68!

MARTHA ROSLER: I saw it!

ARCHITECT: By 69-70 Playboy had done a survey which stated that about 1 or 2 million of American youth identified themselves as revolutionaries.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Wow!

MARTHA ROSLER: Yes.

ARCHITECT: Now! One or two million!

MARTHA ROSLER: It had to be two million.

OLDER MAN [*to himself*]: And surveys come out every year since then with the same results. I suppose young people never change.

ARCHITECT: That doesn't mean that they all, in fact, were revolutionaries, alright?

MARTHA ROSLER: Oh yeah.

ARCHITECT: But the radicalization just grew, and grew, and grew, and grew, alright?

MARTHA ROSLER: Yes.

ARCHITECT: However, the rejection of Stalin—particularly if you were in New York City—was very strong.

BEN MOREA: Oh yeah.

MARTHA ROSLER: Hmm.

ARCHITECT: I think, the other thing to stress is the fear of nuclear war.

MARTHA ROSLER: The what?

ARCHITECT [*to* MARTHA ROSLER *with strained patience*]: The fear of nuclear war. Because we grew up, basically with the feeling of its inevitability. The culture of the 50s, the cinema, the entire culture. We were raised under the threat of nuclear war. The Japanese created Godzilla. You know, Godzilla being a result of a nuclear experiment? This, you

know, was really something strong in us. I, as a kid, I thought I was gonna die.

MARTHA ROSLER: Me too.

SCENE III

Same room.

[CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *quietly sneaks into the room from behind the curtain. Every* MASK *is dressed in full body swimsuits and wears tight swim caps. Meanwhile,* ARCHITECT, *quietly gets off his seat and in a compelled manner, walks over to* PLOTINUS. ARCHITECT *in a whisper requests something from* PLOTINUS, *and we understand that it is directions to the restroom. On his tippy toes,* ARCHITECT *retreats behind the curtain.* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *is visibly entertained.*]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*with a smile in his voice*]: I think we should try to talk about the student movement, and as far as the 60s go, the distinction between the student movement and a youth movement. And what the differences are. You know, how many of those people were actually like college students or enrolled in the universities and what it meant to be a youth. Who was socially involved? Not to just kind of naturally assume that everyone was a student. Maybe not everyone was a student? What that sort of means, or whatever?

MARTHA ROSLER [*slowly*]: Not only were people not students—we didn't care! And the administrators of various schools would go crazy when the outside agitators came on campus.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*interrupting* MARTHA ROSLER]: And that's what I wanted to talk about actually with Ben.

BEN MOREA: As an outside agitator!

[*everyone bursts out in laughter, everyone, but* MARTHA ROSLER]

I used to put that on my resume!

[*more laughter.* MARTHA ROSLER *cannot help herself from being charmed*]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*quietly to himself*]: You never had a resume.

BEN MOREA [*throws another bone*]: This was the title of my resume!

[*at this point even* MARTHA ROSLER *joins in the sweeping celebration*]

Outside agitator of the occupation!

[*the laughter stops abruptly*]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*continuous in a full voice*]: This is connected to the present. Like, my friend and I met with Ben shortly before The New School occupation. You remember Ben?

[BEN MOREA *nods with an ambiguous smile*]

And I actually went to The New School because I heard people talking about it. But then I was like: “What? Why? Who gives a shit about The New School? Who gives a shit about its students?

[*few attempt to laugh*]

Is this what you call a student movement? This is boring. It’s not interesting!”

MARTHA ROSLER [*struggles to follow*]: Who said this?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: I was saying it when we were talking to Ben. Like, you know: “Ben,

what do you think? Why did you go to Columbia? Why did it seem interesting?" And I think his answer was: "Oh, they asked us to come." And you know, I kinda thought, this is nice, because it's simple and this was kinda interesting! And also, it was a site of struggle or a site of confrontation that you could kinda enter into as an outside agitator or whatever. And what that means in the context of a student movement when there is a rupture on a campus or a contract negotiation with faculty or janitors. But how can you enter these struggles if you are not a student or don't identify yourself with the student body? A few of us actually went to The New School during its occupation, which was recently. And we were explicitly saying that we don't care about the students. We don't care about this student movement. We feel whatever.

[BEN MOREA *alone laughs hysterically*]

But like, we also said to the students: "You don't own this! This campus! You don't own it! This is not yours!" So, I ask myself, when does this sort of identity of the student, the role of the student within the student occupation serves for a betterment of the conditions for the students rather than an occupation being about other things? As in Columbia, the one Ben participated in, the occupation can be about other things, or everything, or whatever!

SCENE IV

Same room.

[ARCHITECT *enters the room in a vain attempt to go unnoticed, which brings a smirk to the lips of* GOAT-FOOTED BOY.]

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*delicately*]: I didn't understand.

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupts her authoritatively*]: Excuse me. I was just gonna say that it is really important to realize that one of the differences between then and now is that half of the population in the US was under the age of 25. Now here, this is really, really important. And also, the generation gap, which means that our parents didn't have any sympathy with

what we did, unless we had very unusual parents. As I said, I wasn't a red-diaper baby either. [*with a sense of superiority over* BEN MOREA] I don't know, maybe your family, Ben, was different? [*solemnly, putting an emphasis on every word*] We were making the world new, without even knowing it. And so, it was about being young, and you didn't have to be a student at all. [*loses the sharpness in her gaze*] Ha! The other thing, the other thing I wanted to talk about, before I forget, was direct democracy. We had no ideology, no politics. We didn't know from Marx, we didn't know from Trotsky, we didn't know from Shachtman and Dunayevskaya.

[*slight laughter within the* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK. *While* MARTHA ROSLER *is talking* BEN MOREA *attempts to stay focused. Unbeknownst to himself he starts to rotate the pedals backwards. Now* MARTHA ROSLER *has to pedal backwards as well*]

We only knew, starting with the Port Huron statement, that labor wasn't as bad as people said and that we needed to have that which amounted to council-communism and to hold general assemblies, and those had no name. We would sit around and talk, [*in a high pitch voice*] for hours! All the time! And it took a while before people said, "We need to get some theory here!" And only then would we start reading the books. So the books came much later. And I always get upset. [*looks around the weary room*] I am sorry for going on, but it has so much to do with exactly this question of how do you recognize yourself in each other? I just get upset when people think that we have developed the revolution out of reading something! We did not read anything! And I wasn't a student for most of the 60s. [*disoriented from the backwards pedaling and otherwise very emotional takes her feet off the pedals*] No one cared, right? It wasn't about being a student. However, I would like to say that school is both a site of labor for students and it's also a site of knowledge production. [*recovering from her emotional outburst, looks directly at* GOAT-FOOTED BOY] And that's why I would never go to somebody's school and say: "I don't give a shit about your school and I don't give a shit about the students. I am here to cause trouble." No, seriously [*with the sound of a lump in her throat*] I think it is really disrespectful to join someone's occupation and then tell them that you are doing this for reasons that don't include their will.

BEN MOREA: In Boy's defense, I was just thinking about that. You see, the way we saw it, my group and I, was that every moment, every opportunity, every event was a chance to bring revolutionary consciousness. So when we went to a campus, we were like Boy. We didn't go there as students. They invited us there because they thought we could add something!

MARTHA ROSLER [*disapprovingly*]: Uh huh.

BEN MOREA: But we went to try to raise consciousness, to revolutionize. Wherever we went, we took an advantage of the situation! Like, [*squints to the audience, looking for* ARCHITECT] this guy was in SDS, I can tell. I was friends with all of them. Port…

MARTHA ROSLER: Port Huron.

BEN MOREA: Carl…

MARTHA ROSLER: Carl Oglesby.

BEN MOREA: Tom…

MARTHA ROSLER: Tom Hayden.

BEN MOREA: Right. And, like, every time we would go to an SDS convention, we would use it as an opportunity to raise the idea that we are not trying to make student life better, but we are there to change life itself. Period.

MARTHA ROSLER [*attempts to cut through* BEN MOREA's speech]: But didn't students disagree?

[MARTHA ROSLER*'s question is ignored*]

BEN MOREA [*to* MARTHA ROSLER]: Like, you were talking about smoking and that no

one smoked. Like people, like SDS, were saying: “Revolutionaries don’t smoke!” And I would raise my hand and say: “We smoke more than you think!” We smoked more than the hippies did!

[*both* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *and* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *exchange a look and join one another in an outburst of laughter. The rest of the audience follows*]

In fact, I ran in Boston just for the opportunity to raise consciousness. I ran for president of the SDS chapter in Boston. And I said, fictitiously, that I need more salary because I smoke more dope.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *conceals its laughter under the subdued sound of a cough*]

For me it was a way of raising the issue, that is, if you are gonna change life entirely, you’re no longer a student. [*pauses, forgetting what else he wanted to say. While* MARTHA ROSLER *opens her mouth to say something, he suddenly remembers and adds*] Or a hippy!

[*again* MARTHA ROSLER *is very eager to say something, and again misses the opportunity*]

We wanted it all changed. Students have become, unfortunately, consumers. Instead of consuming a product, they are now consuming an education. And the establishment uses their need for consumption. The schools are holding their students hostage by their debt. They become indentured servants for life! For life! [*pointing at* ARCHITECT, *he suddenly concludes*] I really enjoyed this guy talking.

ARCHITECT [*melodiously, with a solid rhythm*]: Well, that critique existed even back in the 60s.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ARCHITECT: I've heard this critique before, big time! Alright? The thing was: we rejected Wall Street! If someone wanted to be an investment banker, he was regarded as a schmuck!

MARTHA ROSLER: Yeah.

ARCHITECT: People were like: "What? Are you gonna be an investor banker? Are you crazy?" People felt like if you wanted to do something, it's better to be something meaningful! This was what people wanted to do. But all the same traps were awaiting us at every moment in our lives as they do now. The only difference, perhaps, was that the economy was better then than now. Youth culture became a part of everything, and drug culture became a part of youth culture. Rock and roll! Drugs made it easy to relate to everyone of your own age in every part of the US.

MARTHA ROSLER [*speaks over* ARCHITECT]: Except for PLP!

ARCHITECT [*interrupted by* MARTHA ROSLER, *reluctantly replies to her remark*]: PLP! Yes PLP! Progressive Labor Party! What about PLP? Well, maybe for about a year PLP was sort of entertaining…

[MARTHA ROSLER *gives a schoolgirl chuckle.* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *looks at the floor*]

and weird. Like, for example: the vice-president of Sotheby's right now formerly was a member of PLP.

[MARTHA ROSLER *yet again cannot resist an attack of cartoonish laughter. And again no one joins her.* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *moves towards the window and lights their cigarettes in silence*]

One day I showed up at the PLP reunion. And guess what? The president of Sotheby's was there with his golf companion, also a former PLP member. I overheard them talking. They were like: "You can't understand the revolution, unless you've worked in a factory." [*with*

pride] I worked in factories as a kid in New York!

[MARTHA ROSLER *hums in agreement.* POPULIST *clears his throat*]

Now. To think that if you engage in the political struggle by fighting police and getting beat up, you'll get some sort of profound experience is silly. But I don't think we should disparage student activism. That's for sure.

ACT THREE

SCENE I

Same room.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *and* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *swap their positions, and now* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *takes its cigarette break. The room unexpectedly and only for a few seconds is illuminated by a bright orange sunset only to become even darker than before.* PLOTINUS *quickly pulls a big plastic bag from behind the curtain. He first walks over to* MARTHA ROSLER *and* BEN MOREA *between whom he distributes headlamps.* SOCIAL DEMOCRAT *rising in his seat, explains to everyone that he had a prior engagement and that he must attend "this dinner" and leaves with a gratified smile. Meanwhile,* PLOTINUS *distributes the rest of the headlamps between the audience remaining on the bench. Both* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *and* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *receive regular flashlights. For a few moments, everyone is busy figuring out his or her device. When all the lamps are switched on, it becomes apparent that* MARTHA ROSLER'*s lamp is much weaker than the others and that* PLOTINUS *himself has a much larger headlamp than everyone else*.]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: I think a lot of us want to know what prospects there are for a student, a faculty, an adjunct, or whatever, to intervene in the movement now and maybe kind of move out of the 60s. Whatever, maybe it's just me, maybe no one cares?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: But I am owed a clarification. Listening to you all talking about Columbia, I was wondering why didn't somebody mention if the students wanted to enter the office of the…

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupts and finishes* WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT'*s question*]: The president. [*and provides an answer*] They did!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*tries to finish her question*]: ...the president to find papers about the connection…

BEN MOREA: Who?

MARTHA ROSLER: The president.

ARCHITECT: Of Columbia.

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK [*with a smirk*]: President of Columbia.

BEN MOREA [*belated*]: We did!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: They did?

ARCHITECT: They did.

MARTHA ROSLER: Oh yeah!

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*loudly to* BEN MOREA]: You did!

BEN MOREA: We did! We found them. See, there were five buildings occupied at Columbia. But, there was only one building that the police would not enter, [*stutters*] to, to, to…

MARTHA ROSLER: To clear it out.

BEN MOREA: Yes, where we were at! It was our building!

ARCHITECT: Math building.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

BEN MOREA: The students wanted to make some kind of statement. They came to us after the police cleared out the other four buildings. They came to us and said that there is only one left: our building. And after the negotiation with police nobody got arrested, everybody cleared out.

ARCHITECT [*contemplatively*]: Ha.

BEN MOREA: But the students had invited us because they thought we would resist. And you know what? Our building was so fortified that the police knew that there's no way they could enter it.

[MARTHA ROSLER *tries to add something, but is ignored*]

ARCHITECT [*blushes with pride*]: Well, we were gushed with the tear gas. The police had weapons. So for us, there was no other way, but out.

BEN MOREA: In Hamilton?

ARCHITECT: Yes, in Hamilton Hall.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ETERNAL STUDENT: But what about this thing, about the papers? Because I am personally interested in it quite a lot.

[MARTHA ROSLER *tries to add something, but is ignored*]

I think there are so many secrets now…

[MARTHA ROSLER *tries to add something, but is ignored*]

I think that this kind of abuse of knowledge for power, or especially for war, is so prevalent, even more so now, that we can learn a tremendous amount from that. But these documents until today have not been publicized and still cover up what the university was forcing us, the students, to do.

BEN MOREA: It would blow your mind!

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *gives a few unenthusiastic chuckles.* MARTHA ROSLER *yet again tries to add something, but is ignored*]

OLD MAN: I think that it was intentional that they would let us see those papers.

MARTHA ROSLER [*really pushes it this time and manages to interrupt* OLD MAN *successfully*]: Almost every school that had an occupation had first this aim: to go and uncover who was doing what.

[ARCHITECT *makes a sound of impatience*]

And, as a result, a lot of the military links had to be severed. And there is a film on one of the Boston or Harvard, I can’t remember what facility it was, but also at Stanford, Stanford Research Institute had a research…

OLDER MAN: Yeah, and also at MIT was a big thing...

MARTHA ROSLER: Oh! Yes! The MIT! Of course, the MIT.

ARCHITECT: MIT at the moment was the centre of the military research.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right, right.

ETERNAL STUDENT: Were there any concerned scientists at those universities?

ARCHITECT: I think it's not impossible that there were a few.

[MARTHA ROSLER *tries to add something, but is ignored*]

OLDER MAN: In MIT in the 60s, I think, it was in 69, they had a big movement for that reason...

MARTHA ROSLER [*now interrupting* OLDER MAN]: But a lot of people were funded, including the linguistics researchers like Noam Chomsky, by the National Defense Education Act. Because the government was looking for artificial intelligence, a lot of people got funded at the time. Speaking of my experience on the matter, let me tell you that when I was living in San Diego, California, I saw things too. And you might not believe it, but San Diego was a military town. That's what it was.

ARCHITECT [*with a patronizing smile*]: That's what it is.

MARTHA ROSLER: Yeah, but no. Now, it's also a touristy town. Those days it was just a military town for several of the forces. There were secret facilities at Point Loma and other things. There were a lot of things I won't talk about today because we cannot possibly talk about everything. But my point is that there, in California, in towns like San Diego, the movement there was, it wasn't, it was, it wasn't, was…

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK: It was?

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK: It wasn't?

MARTHA ROSLER: It was. And it wasn’t. The student movement. Because very quickly people realize that all of San Diego had a potential of being mobilized in different places. And of course the Latino movement was very important, which of course wasn’t in any way based out of a university. But people were very interested in stopping the war machine, but also in finding out about the academic ties. And people were making a big fuss about it. The question is: is this what we call the Occupy movement?

SCENE II

Same room.

[OLDER MAN *squeezes out from the tight space he has taken on the bench. He leaves the room without looking at anyone or saying “goodbye”. A few gaze at him with envy. The discussion continues accompanied by yawns and rustling.*]

POPULIST: Things are now anonymous because everything is digital.

MARTHA ROSLER: Correct.

POPULIST: We are in an era of…

MARTHA ROSLER: Today, you don’t even have to break the door down!

POPULIST [*with excitement*]: But I love the idea of physically entering the space and shuffling through papers!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*also with excitement*]: But what about hacking?

[*everyone in the room speaks over one another in elation, but only a few voices manage to be heard*]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Let’s hack ‘em!

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: We should hack them!

BEN MOREA: We can hack them!

MARTHA ROSLER: Who?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*wistfully*]: We have already forgotten about the whole WikiLeaks story.

MARTHA ROSLER: I didn’t.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *stifle a giggle*]

ARCHITECT [*with his usual dominance*]: Alright. Everyone has forgotten what had happened in 60s. But it is very similar to the whole WikiLeaks story. I am talking of Ellsberg…

MARTHA ROSLER: Daniel Ellsberg! I remember.

ARCHITECT [*dismissive to* MARTHA ROSLER]: Yeah. He photocopied some classified Pentagon Papers!

MARTHA ROSLER: I remember!

ARCHITECT: This was a big time revelation and it had a tremendous impact.

MARTHA ROSLER: Yeah.

ARCHITECT: Tremendous impact! To this day!

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ARCHITECT: Manning, on the other hand, is different, a different kind of case.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*to* ARCHITECT]: What do you mean?

MARTHA ROSLER [*chimes in*]: You know, Ellsberg speaks about Bradley Manning all the time.

ARCHITECT: All the time!

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*screams, demanding attention*]: What do you mean?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: Manning attends hearings apparently.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*with greater frustration*]: What do you mean Manning is different? How is he different?

ARCHITECT: No, no, different in the sense that he's not the same. Like in case of Ellsberg you had a senior…

MARTHA ROSLER [*with confidence*]: Analyst.

ARCHITECT: A policy maker! Because Ellsberg was a policy maker! And here you have a guy sitting during the war in a head department of the intelligence, in Iraq. This is very different! These circumstances alone!

MARTHA ROSLER [*interrupting*]: Well, one of the differences, wouldn't you say, is that Ellsberg was beyond the reach of the military system and the court system, and the draconian laws that apply specifically to the military office?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: I think that the 2009 New School occupation was also dealing with

various investments documents.

MARTHA ROSLER: Oh really?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Yeah, part of the demand was to unveil what was going on in the administration. Architect, you teach, Martha, you teach. Can you maybe talk about your involvement in the university?

MARTHA ROSLER: What?

[*General confusion*]

ETERNAL STUDENT [*adding to a prevailing disorientation*]: I'm still not sure what papers were taken from Columbia's administration!

BEN MOREA: What?

MARTHA ROSLER. Papers!

ETERNAL STUDENT: What were these papers about?

PLOTINUS [*to* BEN MOREA]: At Columbia.

BEN MOREA: Ah! At Columbia, the big portion of the papers were about the plans to take over the neighborhood of…

MARTHA ROSLER: Harlem.

BEN MOREA: Yeah, they had plans to change that whole Morningside Heights into part of the university campus.

MARTHA ROSLER: That's called…

BEN MOREA: That how the black students got involved originally, because all the people that lived there indigenously were black.

MARTHA ROSLER: That's called…

BEN MOREA: They were black and Columbia wanted them out.

MARTHA ROSLER: It's called the battle for Morningside.

BEN MOREA: But you know what's ironic?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*interrupting everyone*]: But they're doing it now!

[*the room sways with clamor*]

ARCHITECT: But part of the papers was about the Vietnam war.

BEN MOREA [*continuous with his thought*]: It's ironic.

[*general weariness within the audience and the volatile excitement dies out*]

You know, Herbert Marcuse and Franz Neumann, they founded the CIA. That's ironic! They were a part of DOAS then.

MARTHA ROSLER: OSS!

BEN MOREA: And I accused Herbert…

MARTHA ROSLER: OSS!

BEN MOREA: I said to Herbert: "Do you know how much information you have that we

can use?” [*long pause*] And he never responded.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: He had information?

MARTHA ROSLER [*dismissive*]: No.

BEN MOREA: Yes!

POPULIST: The fact is that the information is more concealed now than it was before.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ARCHITECT: No, not really. I actually work up there, in Columbia and there we had an ITC movement that occurred about a year ago. Columbia now has more Iraq and Afghanistan vets than any other ivy league school. And they were very affronted and entered the fight against the administration. It felt like 60s all over again. Alright?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: They also have Iraqi students that they parade around. [*feels that she might have said something wrong, but decides to go on with it*] “See, our Iraqi students!” [*gives a solo chuckle into otherwise silent room*] It’s very horrific!

[*awkward silence*]

BEN MOREA [*feels responsible*]: At Columbia?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*cheers up*]: Yes. Very weird!

SCENE III

Same room.

[POPULIST *and* OLD MAN *simultaneously rise from their seats and retire behind the*

curtain. The bench is now only half occupied. The remaining audience now sits more comfortably, however, visibly tired. Some are leaning their elbows on their knees, some stretching their backs. CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *paces around the room monotonously.* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *lays on the floor around the bench, at times some of them stretching into basic yoga position*.]

ETERNAL STUDENT [*from his seat*]: There is an interesting kind of cleavage at Columbia. There is an architecture school where most of the people are pretty progressive. They are into some version of the Situationists, but there's also a real estate school.

MARTHA ROSLER [*with astonishment*]: There is a real estate school?

ARCHITECT: Yes, it is a division of the architecture school.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ETERNAL STUDENT: There they are training the real estate strategists who are involved in Columbia's expansion project. All these star-architects are also helping to expand Columbia's campus into that portion of Manhattan. This is not even a secret operation. It's just at this particular part of the school the real contradiction takes place. A lot of the architects working on this project are from all over the US, but a lot of them come directly from Columbia.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: Yeah.

ETERNAL STUDENT: I thought this is interesting. Yeah, like, I work as an adjunct at Cooper Union and as you guys might know, the first time since Cooper Union was founded, it is facing tuition charges.

[WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *makes a noise of deep sorrow*]

In the words of Peter Cooper, who of course was a "1-percenter", the idea behind Cooper

Union was always that the “education should be free as air and water“. And so now the students are the ones who have to bear the brunt of the financial crisis while being the ones least responsible for it and most vulnerable. The students, however, did a wonderful thing, in their pop-up exhibition, mapping out all the different people on the board of Cooper, all the institutional and financial connections, all the decisions the board was making.

MARTHA ROSLER: Right.

ETERNAL STUDENT: All the people on its board are, of course, 1-percenters!

MARTHA ROSLER: Shit!

ETERNAL STUDENT: Whatever decision the board made, it was completely untransparent, completely unaccountable. And they basically…

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*without hesitation*]: Built a new building!

[*audience is displeased, but due to its thinned out composition, the sound of indignation comes across as the noise of a toy-train passing through a nursery*]

ETERNAL STUDENT [*feeling intimate*]: I myself, I feel terrible saying this, but, although I love Cooper very much and I love my colleagues and everybody there, I, as an adjunct, I don’t actually spend much time on campus with people at Cooper, doing Cooper stuff.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: For me…

[*the sound of a garbage truck outside the window makes it impossible to hear what* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT *is saying, though she is continues talking and nobody interrupts her, each enjoying a moment without the need to pay attention. Everyone’s lips are slightly agape showing off the vacancy on their faces*]

There are of course tons of issues, but being a graduate student, or adjunct, or whatever…

[*the garbage truck is still right outside the window and now we can also hear the garbage truck workers scream something half-rudely, half-playfully to each other. The corrupted melody of their voices seem to be more attractive to the room than the speech of* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT, *who continues talking without recognizing that she is altogether ignored*]

…the student movement now seems to follow the issue of tuition, but not much more than that…

[*finally, the truck is filled with garbage, and it concludes with an epic horn and a roar of the engine. Everyone's head turns in unison towards the disappearing sound*]

…it goes beyond individual universities.

[*audience along with the speakers are trying to recover after a moment of sweet oblivion by blinking and opening their eyes as wide as they can and by looking at each other making sure everyone shares this state of decomposition.* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT *sits back down on the bench*]

MARTHA ROSLER [*slowly pedaling*]: OK.

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*doesn't get up, still disoriented, to* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT]: Were you talking about the fragmentation of struggle? No. Either way, I just want to go from this student struggle question to the question about feminism and the 60s. The question of feminists and leftists and how did it happen, that later on there can be a feminist movement that is only white or not aware of other things? Or maybe Ben can tell us some stories, about Valerie Solanas, about women who were different and active?

PLOTINUS: Ben!

[BEN MOREA *who took a step forward and closed his eyes during the clatter of the*

garbage truck, is now awoken by the calling of his name. He shakes his head, simultaneously stepping on the pedal, misses it and with resignation falls to the floor]

MARTHA ROSLER [*at first not knowing how to react, attempts to answer the question instead of* BEN MOREA]: In my experience…

[*for a few seconds everyone is in a stupor.* PLOTINUS *comes first to help a crestfallen* BEN MOREA. *Then,* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK *comes to assist. Together they move a groaning* BEN MOREA *towards the bench, clearing it off, so* BEN MOREA *can lie down and recover. The audience now moves around the room.* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT *and* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *sit down on the floor near* BEN MOREA. WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT *sits behind them.* ARCHITECT *and* ETERNAL STUDENT *stand on the other side of the bench. Meanwhile,* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *raise their torsos off the floor, on their elbows, to have a better view on what's going on around them.* MARTHA ROSLER *continuous*]

In my experience, the women's movement was multi-class and multi-ethnic. We were not in New York. [*glances at* BEN MOREA'*s body*] We were not a bourgeois movement. We were a women's liberation movement! We were not members of N.O.W. We had no interest in N.O.W. We were much more radical and if we had a name, we would be called "socialist feminists". We spent very little time on campus. When I first joined the women's liberation movement, I wasn't even a student yet. But we set up a day care centre, one on-campus and one off-campus. The latter one was very ethnically diverse. There were black and Latino communities both represented. We also worked with working class women! And what I'm trying to say about this sort of "outside agitator" is that we were the "outside agitators on campus!" So, you know, we saw it as sort of being at the base of the operation. And we engaged in strange activities on campus. There, we were trying to figure out who owns what, who gives orders, who pays bills, so to speak. We found out, actually, a lot of real estate craziness was going on in admin! And we saw ourselves as a part of the community in San Diego. In San Diego to be a part of the community meant to fully participate in its life, to go deep down and also to work with the small towns around. [MARTHA ROSLER *pauses, looks around. No one seems to be ready to say or add something*] Yeah, I also

wanted to say a few words about Yale. I was teaching at Yale in the 2000s and at the time the Graduate Students Association was kicking up a lot of shit, going on strike and other things. And with them were always representatives of the local unions, unions of workers at Yale and other members of the community. There was never a GSA meeting with only students represented there. And I think this made it very powerful as a force but also very threatening to the admin. And I think that the GSA at NYU, some years back, had a similar strategy. Right? Am I right?

[*nobody replies to the recollection.* BEN MOREA *finds more raisins in his pocket and chews audibly in the otherwise mute room*]

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*rescuing* MARTHA ROSLER]: Yes, Yes! I remember! You're right, yeah!

MARTHA ROSLER: I've sort of changed the subject, but it's also the same subject. Right?

SCENE IV

Same room.

[POPULIST *steps into the room. By the window he finds an umbrella, and takes it and disappears again*]

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: I have a question. [*to* BEN MOREA] Earlier, you were saying something about Trotsky killing that woman?

MARTHA ROSLER [*doing everyone a favor*]: Alexandra Kollontai.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: Can you break down exactly why he would want to kill her?

BEN MOREA [*while laying down*]: Why what?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: Why he wanted to kill her?

BEN MOREA: Kill who?

MARTHA ROSLER: Alexandra Kollontai!

BEN MOREA: They who? Wanted to kill who?

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: Trotsky!

MARTHA ROSLER: And Lenin.

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *still lying on the floor laugh to themselves. Both choruses are deeply engaged with their smartphones*]

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*whispering to* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK]: Did you see it?

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK [*whispering back at* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK]: How do you spell her name?

PLOTINUS: Ben! Why did you say Trotsky and Lenin killed Kollontai?

BEN MOREA: Because she denounced them as trying to replace the Tzar with a new authority. And so she was oppositional to them.

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*whispering to* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK]: Do you want to know?

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK [*whispering back at* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK]: She never died?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: What's interesting is that maybe only in CUNY and in Hunter, Trotskyist and Maoist organizations still exist!

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*whispering to* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK]: Good guess. No. But she died when she was 79.

CHORUS OF WHITE MASK [*whispering back at* CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK]: Do you mean from old age?

CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK [*whispering to* CHORUS OF WHITE MASK]: Correct.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: Do people know that there is an occupation in Columbia right now?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Where?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: In the hallway of the architecture building.

ARCHITECT [*writing something into his pocket notebook*]: Ha.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*ridiculing*]: They have this big sign that says "Occupy Columbia." It's pathetic!

MARTHA ROSLER: Are they sleeping there?

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: No! Of course not, they are not doing anything there! [*a minute of silence*]

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*in an attempt to fill in the silence*]: In 2009 at the New School occupation, only Nancy Fraser supported the students and she was the only one who said that all the charges should be dropped. But the administration did not do it. Students were

charged. Then, at the recent New School occupation, in 2011, the faculty of the Philosophy Department denounced its students describing the occupation as violent and disruptive. So even in these seemingly progressive schools like New School, the faculty is still pretty reactionary.

MARTHA ROSLER: Ugh.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*with more enthusiasm*]: And then a week later, New School is hosting a conference on Occupy by N+1…

MARTHA ROSLER [*sighs with disappointment*]: Oh really?

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: And it's after they evicted students! After the Philosophy department denounced its students!

[*while* GOAT-FOOTED BOY *is speaking,* PLOTINUS *walks around the room, looking for something. He finds an extension cord and plugs it into an available outlet. Then he extracts from behind the curtain a portable stove. He also finds a water boiler, which he turns on. On the stove, he places a small pot and heats something in it. The room becomes steamy and noisy*]

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT [*over the sound of boiling water, to* GOAT-FOOTED BOY]: Right, I looked up this conference on YouTube. According to N+1, the world has changed and the earth was new.

MARTHA ROSLER [*interested*]: Oh yeah?

ETERNAL STUDENT [*to himself*]: Not what I've heard.

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Yeah, sure. I just don't have the energy to repeat the whole thing!

[CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *laughs, everyone laughs*]

WOMAN WITH AN ACCENT: I am sorry, I am sorry! [*referring to* GOAT-FOOTED BOY] Can you please talk about the beef between N+1 and Verso. What actually happened?

MARTHA ROSLER: Yes!

GOAT-FOOTED BOY: Well, they were hosting a conference at the school where the occupation just took place and was taken down. Everyone likes the idea of occupation, but no one wants it in his own house.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*interrupting*]: There was also something at NYU...

ETERNAL STUDENT [*interrupting*]: It also happened at the exact same time as the other conference on Occupy that was essentially organized by people involved in the occupation at New School. So, there was actually no reason why they couldn't have moved it like 20 blocks, let's say, downtown.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*interrupting*]: What do people think about the, ugh… [*for a few long seconds struggles to finish her thought and fails while everyone else is staring at her with tangled faces*]

PLOTINUS [*stirring up something inside the pot, speaks very slowly*]: That could be a nice point of stopping you guys.

[*an outburst of laughter while* PLOTINUS *apologetically continues*]

I know that Martha has to leave for a trip tomorrow early and Ben has been awake since 5 am.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: Oh! I remember now! The classes!

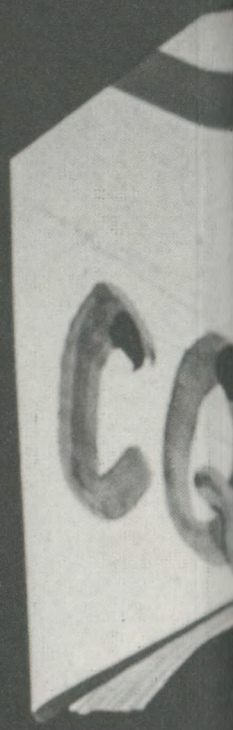
GOAT-FOOTED BOY [*patronizing*]: Wow! A new wave of energy.

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT: The classes at NYU were given on Occupy Wall Street! [*attention in the room is thinning*. CHORUS OF PAINTED MASK *gets off the floor and walks around the room talking loudly to one another*]

WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT [*losing her enthusiasm*]: They really were giving classes focusing on the Occupy movement.

[*last words of* WOMAN WITHOUT AN ACCENT *are lost in a room that becomes at once more alive. People stand up and walk around, stretch their backs, crack their knuckles. Not without difficulty,* MARTHA ROSLER *climbs down from her bicycle. With a hot pot in his hands,* PLOTINUS *walks over to* BEN MOREA *and helps* BEN MOREA *to sit up.* BEN MOREA *eats his supper*]

THE END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